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**GODSMACK**

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JULY 2006

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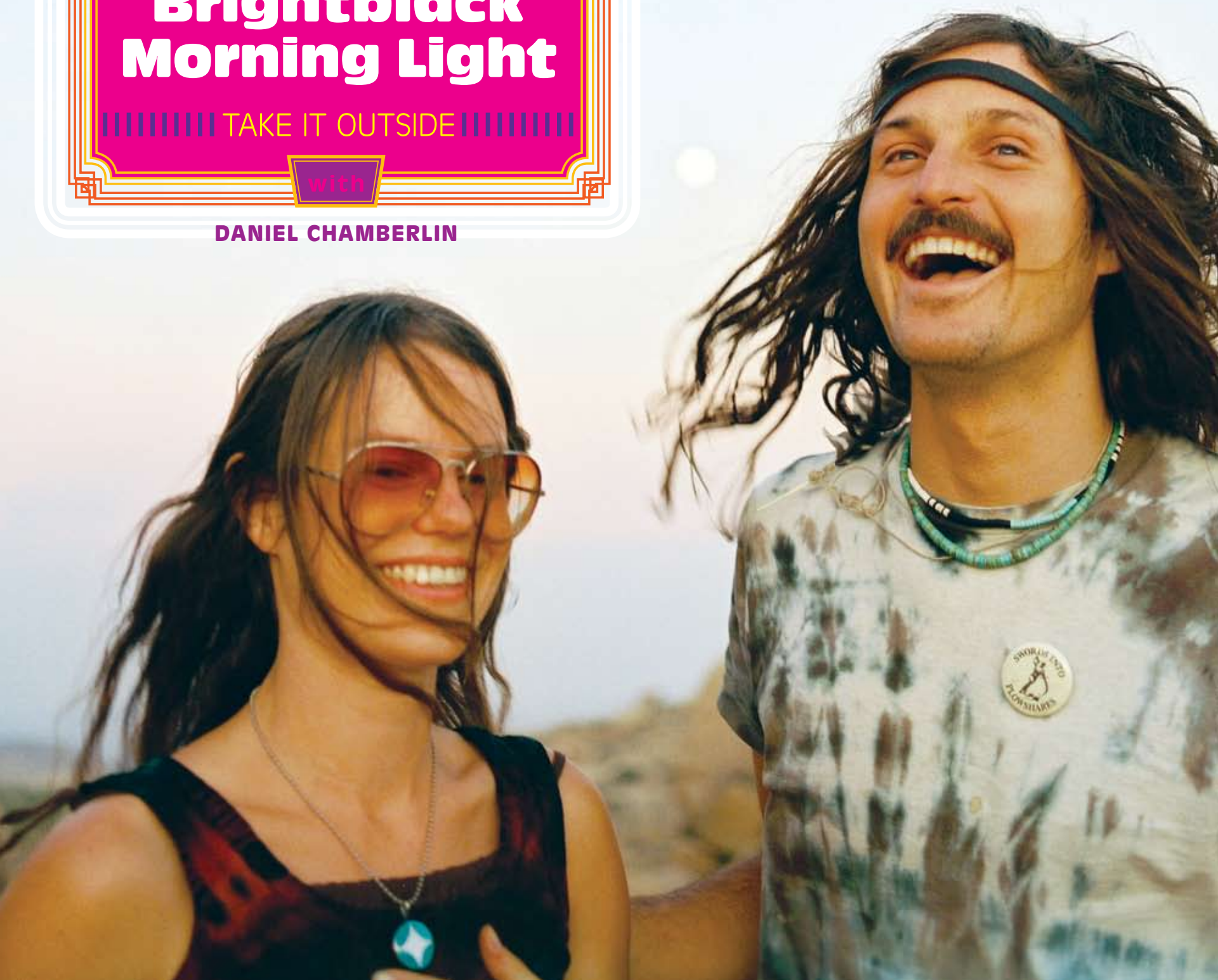
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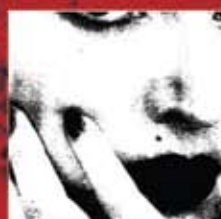
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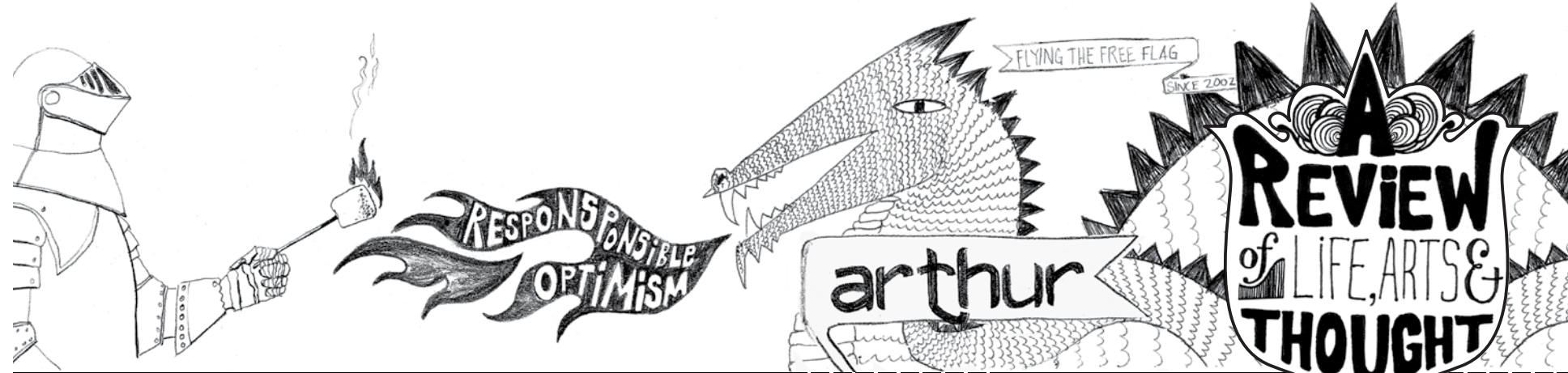
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for their hard work and support.**

## departments

### I'm Just Saying

✻ 4 ✻

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Info about what our contributors are up to.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*Is Arthur sexist?*, a reader wonders.

#### WRITING ON THE WALL

Scandalous Bible Story graffiti,

#### STRINGS

by PShaw

#### THE NEW HERBALIST

Molly Frances on the wonders of mint.

### Applied Magic(k)

✻ 6 ✻

*Sigils, logos and lucky charms:*

how to recognize them and, even more thrilling, how to  
use them, courtesy of the Center for Tactical Magic.

### Douglas Rushkoff

✻ 10 ✻

Why I'm not moving to Canada

### Comics

✻ 19 ✻

Sonambulist Theater: Hot Stuff Dream by J. T. Miles

### Reviews

#### BULL TONGUE

✻ 49 ✻

Columnists Byron Coley & Thurston Moore  
review the latest emanations from  
the deep underground

#### C & D

✻ 55 ✻

#### TAKE MULTIPLE INFUSIONS OF

Comets on Fire, Vetiver, Awesome Color, *Zizek!*,  
*Beavis and Butthead Vol. 2*, *Phi Ta Khon: Ghosts of Isan*,  
*A Visit to Ali Farka Toure*, Tony Allen, *Eccentric Soul*:  
*The Big Mack Label*, James Hunter, Ramblin' Jack Elliot,  
Loren Connors, Charalambides and  
*The Golding Institute Presents Final Relaxation*.

#### DO THE MATH

✻ 62 ✻

Survivalism for Hipsters 101  
by Dave Reeves.

COVER

Brightblack Morning Light (Joshua Tree, May 2006)  
photographed by Eden Batki.

## features

### Country Life

Who are Brightblack Morning Light and how did they make one of the most  
beautiful albums of our time? Daniel Chamberlin catches up with the nomadic  
quiet-souls under a full moon in Joshua Tree. Photography by Eden Batki.

### Everything Must Go

Good riddance to bad rubbish: Derrick Jensen wants to re-wild the planet—  
now. Interview by Jay Babcock. Photography by Shayla Hason.

### An Optimist on Two Fronts

The little-seen, oft-suppressed work of dissident filmmaker Peter Watkins  
challenged not just the political status quo but the form itself.  
By John Patterson.

### Playing Dead

How activists are protesting inside online video games; plus, a brief history of  
the heavy crossover between video game makers and the military.  
By Ed Halter, with illustrations by Geoff McFetridge.

### Heavy Air

40 New earfuzz tones and drones from New Orleans, courtesy of a duo called  
Belong. Gabe Soria interviews the dudes; Arik Roper paints a picture.

### Are You There Godsmack?

44 *Arthur* asked Godsmack singer Sully Erna to explain his pro-war statements  
and his No. 1 million-selling pop-rock band's involvement in military recruiting  
campaigns. Then things got stupid.

Big thanks  
to W. T. Nelson.  
Best of luck.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Eden Batki** suggests spending the night in Joshua Tree on a full moon under the stars. Shadows at midnight are way cool. Making friends who live in the desert is even cooler. edenbatki.com

**Daniel Chamberlin**'s attempt at an "intellectual mountain man" aesthetic has resulted in "rustic nerd" vibes. Find field guide reviews, wilderness diaries and more at [www.danielchamberlin.com](http://www.danielchamberlin.com)

**Mr. Byron Coley** continues to strive for a higher level of existence. Any tips gratefully accepted.

**Molly Frances** enjoys the company of almost all rocks, herbs, and animals. molly@crystalarchive.com

**Ed Halter** is a critic for the Village Voice and has written for many other fine publications. His book *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* was published this month by Thunders Mouth Press. He blogs at [warandvideogames.com](http://warandvideogames.com)

**Shayla Hason**'s current pursuits include puttering around my internerd bungalow ([www.urbanhonking.com/dokuchan](http://www.urbanhonking.com/dokuchan)), travelling to Shanghai, eating from farmers markets, reading voraciously, and recording with Riddenpaa.

**Beau Johnson** writes mystery novels. More secret luxuries at [theultimatethrill.com](http://theultimatethrill.com)

**Geoff McPetridge** is working on a new book for Bastet, taking down a show at New Image Art in Los Angeles, making art for Patagonia's new surf clothing line and reading *Little House on the Prairie*.

**Thurston Moore** is on tour this summer with his band Sonic Youth in support of their new *Rather Ripped* album.

**John Patterson** writes a weekly column on film and television for the *Guardian*.

**Pshaw** recently debuting his newest comics, a limited-edition plush, and 7 inch record at the MoCCA Small Press Fest. More details about where to meet and greet him at [www.pshaw.net](http://www.pshaw.net)

**Dave Reeves** has an article coming out in *Mass Appeal* on child actors. Also, he wants you to be sure to see the new Larry Clark movie, *Wassup Rockers*.

**Arik Roper** is an illustrator and designer living in New York City. He makes fantastic imagery for CD/album art, posters, t-shirts and other merchandise design for a variety of bands. He is a contributor to *Strange Attractor Journal* and does work for Bill Graham Presents. [www.arikroper.com](http://www.arikroper.com)

Media theorist **Douglas Rushkoff**'s latest project, *Testament*, is an adult comic book translating Bible stories into near-future dystopian morality fables. A trade paperback collection of the first five issues will be published by DC/Vertigo in July.

Brooklyn-based husband and dad **Gabe Soria** is hard at work on his long-promised (to his friends, at least) debut science fiction novel. One day soon it'll actually be published under the Drunken Spacemen Press imprint.



## WRITING ON THE WALL

**Possibly East 4th Street**  
**Julia Yepes of New York City spotted this graffitti last summer in the East Village.**

Seen any good slogans/commentary/poetry on the streets lately? Then take a picture of it. Send it to us at 300dpi, 100%. (If you don't know what that means, ask somebody who does.) Include the time/place of the photo. If your photo is chosen as Arthur's "Billboard of the Month" you'll get a complimentary one-year subscription to Arthur. Send entries to [editor@arthurmag.com](mailto:editor@arthurmag.com).



## LETTERS

### Is Arthur sexiſt?

Dear Arthur,  
I have loved reading your magazine over the past year (I usually pick up from AS220 in Providence). I most appreciate detailed and lengthy articles on non-Western cultures; interviews with and essays about radical and compelling artists and musicians; and cultural commentary. The music reviews also bring me back to a bygone era when I used to get the *Forced Exposure* catalog by mail. I read all the reviews and enjoy them.

Anyways, I was inspired to order a subscription because of Jay's interview with Sully Erna of Godsmack, posted online. I am not a fan of Godsmack, but the interview was great and I appreciate Jay's description of *Arthur* Magazine as an anti-war publication.

However, this is not meant to be just a very long love note. I have been torn about some aspects of your magazine that are troubling to me, so I thought I would just share those. Do with them what you will.

1) The magazine feels a bit hyper-masculine. This is not entirely a bad thing. I pour through articles by men traveling through Middle Eastern countries, meeting and hanging out with other men; articles about male musicians; features on mal cultural icons; and more articles by and about men. No doubt you get some great women in there—as writers, artists and as subjects. But oh, so few that they feel like—not tokens—but perhaps the chosen few.

2) The thing that brought back this lack of women in the magazine to the level of concern that is driving me to write about it—are the advertisements for American Apparel at the back of every issue of *Arthur* that I have read. Talk about torn—the phenomenon of American Apparel has me in a quandary. An L.A.-based company that pays decent wages to garment workers by keeping their production in the U.S.? Who can argue with that? Until you are besieged by advertisements with a cheap-porn sensibility portraying half-naked women who are clearly not professional models featuring clothes that you almost can't see in the photographs. At first the ads on the back of *Arthur* just sort of miffed me. I assumed that American Apparel was some sort of jock clothing company, selling sweats and tee shirts to a target audience of 20-something college sports fan dudes with cheerleader fantasies. The next ad looked like cheap porn that was slightly more arty, making me wonder if the target audiences was more along the lines of indie-rock dudes. The last ad I saw was supposedly for a pair of socks—though the socks were hardly visible in the ad—as a woman's ass was the focal point of the photograph. Trying to be objective, I thought—well at least she's not an anorexic model—she's actually GOT an ass. But she was described in the ad text as a "Cubana" and her ass was described as "bubblicious." So whoever the hell the target audience is for these ads, it's clearly not me because

that just made me angry. And now this is an American Apparel store in downtown Providence and when I walk past it, I am given the gift of that same pissed-off feeling when I see photos of (clearly) amateur "models" half-naked, on the ground, legs spread, boobs pushing out of their t-shirts. And when you are a woman walking down the street alone, particularly at night, images like this can be unsettling. The reminder that women are walking sex—no matter who you are. And the reminder that all of the men around you are getting the same reminder through photos like these.

So, these ads serve to push Arthur from merely male-centric to seemingly sexist. Clearly I do not feel that the magazine IS sexist. I wouldn't pay for it if I did (as I cannot bring myself to shop at American Apparel—which I totally would if not for those ads). Sexism is a boring, conventional and uncritical way of viewing the world, and the writing and perspectives put forth in *Arthur* Magazine are more sophisticated than that. And so I am left still trying to figure out how to understand these aspects of *Arthur*: where they come from; if they are symptomatic of sexism within the company; if this is all a sad trend in an otherwise intellectual and creative endeavor; if the women have just not been discovered by the magazine yet and SOON there will be women galore?

That's all. Thanks for reading.

**Cristina Maria Di Chiera**  
Providence, Rhode Island

*Cristina,*  
*We will be addressing many of the issues you raise in the next issue. In the meantime, we would appreciate feedback from other readers, our contributors and our advertisers on the points you've brought up. Does Arthur have a sexism problem? How should it be corrected? And what do you think of American Apparel? Etc. —Ed.*

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**All correspondence will be considered for publication, unless otherwise marked.**

### CORRECTION

Last issue's short article on February's two-day ArthurBall festival in Los Angeles totally failed to let readers know that the event took place at The Echo, The Ex\_Plx and Jensen's Recreation Center in the Echo Park area. Also, we failed to say that the event was produced and co-presented by Spaceland Productions. Arthur sincerely regrets the omissions.

# A Better Way to Cool Off

As spring fever's eager blossoming inevitably withers into the summertime blues, we seek quick relief among the abundance of icy blended concoctions that our advanced civilization offers us. Unfortunately, though that iced coffee provides a momentary respite on a balmy day, it will also quickly return you to a state of dehydration and turn up the heat of your internal thermostat.

The ingredient for the most soothing and refreshing of summer drinks is probably already growing in your garden. For a deeply cooling drink, brew up a tasty pot of mint tea.

A handful of the fresh herb plucked from your garden and tossed into a carafe of hot water will have you living the good life in no time at all. Be sure to include the stems of the plant. This tea may be served cold as well, but resist the temptation of pulling out your blender. Frozen drinks and ice cream will hold heat in your body and freeze digestion. To really keep extra cool this summer, avoid your freezer and enjoy your summer beverages without ice.

For a truly sublime experience, serve your friends a pot of Atay bi Na'na'. Made from boiling water, fresh mint, a small amount of green tea and honey to taste, Morocco's most popular drink is consumed all day long. Usually served in ornate silver pots and small decorated glasses, it is customary for three servings to be offered by the host, who pours the tea from a distance of up to several feet above to aerate the brew and show off his skills. Practice this *before* the guests arrive.

In addition to its cooling properties, Mint tea settles the stomach and digestive disorders, eases migraines, and helps draw out infection upon first signs of a sore throat. The powerful antiviral properties of peppermint are due to its main active ingredient, menthol oil, which opens and heals sinuses, bronchial tubes, and vocal chords. It is also said to create a mentally stimulating and relaxing vibration that reduces stress and anxiety.

So what have we done to deserve this magical leaf? As the legend goes, Hades, god of the underworld, was busted by his wife Persephone in mid-frolic with a hot young wood nymph named Mintha. Persephone, who had been somewhat rudely snatched down to the underworld by Hades in the first place, was in no mood to overlook this infidelity and stomped the little nymph underfoot, transforming her into the plant we know today as Mint. In a gesture of atonement to Mintha, Hades would endow the plant with its sweet and unmistakable aroma.

Persephone may have extinguished Mintha in the flesh, but her spirit has lived on in this most



THE NEW HERBALIST  
by Molly Frances

promiscuous of plants. There are few lands that the wildly propagating mint has not travelled to, and few cultures that she has not seduced. As 16th century herbalist John Gerard declared, "The smelle rejoiceth the heart of man." From Egyptian temples to Roman baths, Mint has been used for all varieties of healing and pleasure. The Pharisees even paid their taxes with it, as revealed by this scolding from Jesus: "Woe to you, Pharisees! You tithe the mint and rue and every edible herb but disregard justice and the love of God." Ouch!

While perhaps more prized for its pleasure-inducing than medicinal properties, the mint julep has been the preferred drink of the Southern Aristocracy. Accept nothing less than fresh mint, water, sugar, and kentucky bourbon. As one of its key proponents, S.B. Buckner, Jr. warned in 1937: "A mint julep...is a ceremony...a rite that must not be entrusted to a novice, a statistician, nor a Yankee." He instructs, "Go to a spring where cool, crystal-clear water bubbles from under a bank of dew-washed ferns. In a consecrated vessel, dip up a little water at the source. Follow the stream through its banks of green moss and wildflowers until it broadens and trickles through beds of mint growing in aromatic profusion and waving softly in the summer breezes. Gather the sweetest and tenderest shoots and gently carry them home."

As Mintha clearly gets around, she has crossbred into hundreds of varieties including chocolate mint, basil mint, ginger mint, Persian mint, Corsican mint and Pineapple mint. All this intermingling frustrated one 9th-century monk, who declared, "I would rather count the sparks in Vulcan's furnace than count the varieties of mint." The most popular forms are spearmint and peppermint, the former most often used in cooking but the latter more medicinally potent.

As Buckner proclaimed, "bury your nose in the mint, inhale a deep breath of its fragrance and sip the nectar of the gods." ③



# Sigils, Logos & Lucky Charms

One of the first lessons of magic(k) that we learn as children is that words and symbols have power. Abracadabra. Hocus Pocus. A five-pointed star. A four-leaf clover. As we get older, this primary notion quickly degrades and often becomes the source of one of the first dismissive tendencies towards magic(k) that arises amongst adults. Too many hokey movies and failed attempts to levitate with an utterance conspire against us. Soon the lesson is forgotten; magic(k) words and the power of symbols sneak away to party with Santa and the tooth fairy.

But words and symbols continue to work their magic(k) regardless of whether or not we believe in them. Look at the recent outcry against Madonna singing from the cross or riots in response to Mohammed cartoons and we begin to see that the power of symbols is anything but make-believe. For those who insist that religious sensitivities are an easy shot, consider this secular example: For over 150 years the United States had a Department of War. During much of that time U.S. foreign policy consisted of "neutrality" and therefore the DoW did not lend any direct military support in foreign conflicts.

World War II put a definitive end on U.S. neutrality once and for all, and in 1947 the DoW was renamed the "National Military Establishment" or NME (pronounced "enemy"). Realizing the error of their acronym, politicians again changed the name in 1949 to what we know today as the "Department of Defense." More than half a century after "war" became "defense" the DoD sits deep within the Pentagon planning "pre-emptive defensive strikes" while waving a flag with 50 pentagrams on it.

Okay, so spin-doctoring isn't exactly the same thing as witch-doctoring. Still, most performing magicians (conjurers) won't deny the power of language. And few will debate the fact that word choice makes a difference when presenting a trick. Many will even insist that the "patter" makes or breaks the illusion. More to the point, the strength and efficacy of a trick is often closely tied to the audience's ability to relate both specifically and abstractly to the overall illusion. This is precisely why magic with money tends to hold people's attention more than tricks with handkerchiefs. Money is already a loaded symbol, whereas how many people revere a silk hanky? If you still maintain your doubts, try first performing card tricks over

lunch and then later in the middle of a poker game. Any guesses on which audience gets more riled up when you magically produce four aces from up your sleeve?

Admittedly, the ability to make a scrap of green paper covered in Masonic symbols disappear doesn't quite live up to our childhood expectations of magic(k). Perhaps this is especially true because we become adept at making dollars disappear all the time. As we grow older, we become initiated into the Church of Consumerism. It is here that we become increasingly distrustful of anything "magical" since we quickly find the mystique tarnished by a barrage of commodities gilded in glitz. Yesterday's potions, spells, and apparatuses are hawked as today's energy drinks, pharmaceuticals, and hi-tech gizmos. Finding ourselves surrounded by "magic" cleaning supplies, "power" tools, and Lucky Charms, it's easy to concede that there's no such thing as "real" magic(k). Yet, ironically this is where some of the oldest to concede that there's no such thing as "real" magic(k). Yet, ironically this is where some of the oldest forms of magic(k) still thrive today.

Emblazoned on nearly every product, within every

*The Center for Tactical Magic is a moderate international think tank dedicated to the research, development and deployment of all types of magic in the service of positive social transformation. To find out more, check out tacticalmagic.org*

## Power Transposition Spell or How to Subvert Institutional Authority through Graffiti and Other Tactics in 13 Steps

- Choose an institutional target (school, corporation, government agency, town, etc).
- Create a small label (approx. 3" x 4") which includes the institution's seal or logo, as well as the words: Signs or Graffiti Permitted on This Surface (or an appropriate variation of your choosing).
- Affix the labels to various surfaces within the institution. At first, it is best to target surfaces that have existing postings or writing (e.g. bulletin boards, bathroom walls, pay phones, etc).
- Begin responding to your own labels by covertly adding signs, postings, and graffiti. Be sure to vary the content and use multiple scripts or different graphic elements. Some gestures, tags, or styles should appear more prolific than others so as to convince the "authorities" that multiple individuals are responding to the labels in no organized fashion.

Secretary of Defense/War Pig Donald H. Rumsfeld poses with three of his favorite lucky charms.



**Applied Magic(k)**  
By  
The Center for Tactical Magic

# THE FUTUREHEADS

## NEWS & TRIBUTES

NEW ALBUM OUT JUNE 13

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WWW.MYSPACE.COM/THEFUTUREHEADS

### ON TOUR SUMMER 2006

6.15.06	Vancouver BC	Commodore *	7.25.06	Philadelphia PA	Starlight **
6.16.06	Seattle WA	Neumos *	7.26.06	Toronto ON	Phoenix **
6.18.06	San Francisco CA	Fillmore *	7.27.06	Detroit MI	Magic Stick **
6.19.06	Los Angeles CA	Henry Fonda *	7.28.06	Columbus OH	Newport **
6.23.06	Dallas TX	Gypsy Ballroom *	7.29.06	Chicago IL	Pitchfork Music Festival **
6.24.06	Austin TX	La Zona Rosa *	7.30.06	Minneapolis MN	Varsity **
6.26.06	Atlanta GA	The Loft *	8.2.06	Denver CO	Bluebird **
6.27.06	Carboro NC	Cats Cradle *	8.3.06	Salt Lake City UT	Club Sound **
6.28.06	Washington DC	9:30 Club *	8.4.06	Las Vegas NV	Jillians **
6.30.06	New York NY	Webster Hall *	8.5.06	San Diego CA	Street Scene **
7.1.06	Boston MA	Paradise Rock Club *			

\* w/French Kicks \*\* w/Tapes 'n Tapes



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COMETS ON FIRE Avatar


CD / LP [www.subpop.com](http://www.subpop.com)

SUB POP

Although Madison Avenue  
images now refer to spells,  
incantation and sigils as  
slogans, jingles and logos,  
the effects are just as  
powerful as ever.

Through repeated exposure to the logo, the consumer begins to identify directly with the logo and no longer differentiates between the logo and the product represented by the logo. The logo has become a direct stand-in for the product itself. Through force of habit the logo now represents a standard (albeit an irrational one not often governed by actual quality) by which all other similar products are measured and found lacking. (i.e. why do you favor one brand of electronics over a brand you have never heard of or seen before? And, why is it "cool" to wear the logo of that company on your t-shirt?). And finally, there is autonomic or hypnotic association. Like Pavlov's dogs who began to salivate at the sound of the dinner bell, the consumer who has reached a state of hypnotic association will begin to physically manifest a desire for the product upon merely seeing the associated logo. In such cases, the consumer's willingness to act on this irrational desire happens because s/he has not only come to associate the logo with the product but also with the feeling(s) s/he's attached to the product (status, sex appeal, satiety, power, success, etc). Even a momentary, peripheral glimpse of the logo may be enough to make the consumer hunger for the product and act towards quenching the thirst of an irrational desire. To

Essentially a meditative tool used to focus one's conscious and subconscious attentions towards manifesting a specific result, a sigil can be made by anyone for any reason. The sigil has no power of its own, and means nothing to those who have no associations with it. However, a sigil that is unleashed and gains popular recognition can maintain a power that is both subjective and collective. Although Madison Avenue images now refer to spells, incantation and sigils as slogans, jingles and logos, the effects are just as powerful as ever.

Authority commonly wields power through the manipulation of sign systems which individuals are collectively programmed to accept as valid structures of discipline and control. Fortunately, magic(k) is an open-source technology that doesn't exclusively belong to advertising execs and policy-makers. Outlined below is a sequence of actions that will effectively illustrate the aforementioned dynamics. Further, the following sequence of actions also serves as a general spell for revealing that "authority" is a subjective force, and that victory is awarded to those who play the 'Sign Game' best. While strict adherence to the spell will often yield successful results, an accurate understanding of the underlying principles will allow for delightful adaptations and diverse applications. Have fun & Good luck! And please let us know of your results by emailing us at: [goodluck@tacticalmagic.org](mailto:goodluck@tacticalmagic.org). 

**7**

Replace any labels that have since been removed and continue to add graffiti and postings. At this point some graffiti/postings should be direct responses to the "institutional notice." Some responses should sound incensed, while others should appear mocking. Most likely, other anonymous individuals will have joined in at this point and the debate should be widening.

**8**

Locate a blank section of wall, or an area where graffiti has been allowed to persist. Using a slightly off-color shade of paint, cover a large, uneven section of the wall. Affix a sign alongside reading, "Wet Paint" and another stating that "any graffiti which does not beautify the area will not be tolerated). This will give the impression that the Authorities are ineptly attempting to cover the graffiti, while simultaneously giving a nod to "acts of beauty."

**9**

Create a second notice stating that employees/students/community members may be subject to random searches for graffiti paraphernalia. Distribute it widely. Additionally, signs should be posted declaring rewards for reporting graffiti as well as phone numbers to call (police, management, etc).

**10**

Continue to add graffiti and postings, but extend the range outside of the proximity of the labels.

**11**

If the debate has become heated enough at this point, create another notice/email in the "voice of Authority" declaring a "town hall" meeting with attendance required. Be sure to include a sentence indicating that food and beverages will be provided (You may even want to place a large order for pizzas to be delivered). The date of the meeting should give the "authorities" as little time to prepare as possible.

**12**

A note on the workplace: If the target institution is the workplace, then give consideration to the scheduling time. A lunch-hour meeting will impose on co-workers and encourage opposition to the institution. A mid-afternoon or mid-morning meeting will result in a period of unproductivity that will provide a much-deserved break for your co-workers. An after-work meeting time should include a promise of overtime wage compensation for all attendees.

**13**

Have fun at the meeting, but be careful not to take sides in a manner that will draw attention to you. At most, make constructive suggestions or offer compromises such as calling for more communal space or resources (a community center, lounge, or project funding), asking for more community dialogue or representation (push for shared power and self-management), or requesting conditions that are less restrictive/oppressive (more time off, less rules or better use of community funds). Or, just sit back and watch the fireworks.

**14**

If events haven't climaxed by this point, create a final notice summarizing the institution's willingness to respond to concerns raised at the meeting. Declare new policies and promises; be sure to be creative about your desires (designated graffiti/posting zones, slackening of rules or restrictions, school/business holidays, etc.). At this point you and your community are the authorities, so start acting like it by making the necessary changes and organizing for a better tomorrow!





# Why I'm not moving to Canada



Illustration by Cassandra Chase



by  
Douglas Rushkoff

L ooks like things are going to get worse here in the United States before they get better.

Military adventures abroad kill many while proving little. Fundamentalism of the most noxious kind is fueled by a political system growing more cynically manipulative by the day. Education declines along with America's innovative capacity and global standing. The dollar declines as the deficit rises. The rich get richer while the poor get poorer, not as some unintended side effect of economic policy but rather as an orchestrated result. Access to foods and nutrients that work is directly challenged by chemical and pharmaceutical industries who enjoy more attention from Congress than does our nation's health. Real estate prices rise along with college tuitions, rendering class mobility less fluid than ever, while credit and healthcare industries cost individuals a majority of their income.

Is America really such a great place to live, anymore? Perhaps not.

At least a real estate agent friend of mine doesn't seem to think so. Although she's selling multi-million-dollar fixer-uppers here in Park Slope, Brooklyn, she's already planning for her family's exodus to Toronto, where healthcare and housing are still within reach of the upper middle class.

And it's hard to blame her. Who enjoys being a citizen—a participant, really—in some of the things America does around the world? Who wants to be a member of a club that is in the process of outlawing gay marriage along with second trimester abortions? Do you want your kids going to public schools where, if Senate Republicans have their way, creationism will be taught in science class along with evolution? Worse, as America's oil, currency, and nuclear proliferation wars expand, a military draft appears inevitable.

Isn't this about the time when sane, progressive Americans begin to think about migrating to our

northern neighbor?

It'd be particularly easy for an independent contractor like me. I can write from anywhere. I've even gotten a few teaching offers from Canadian universities. Many of the churches and synagogues up there even embrace interfaith dialogue and more metaphorical understanding of sacred texts. Hell, the originator of modern, bottom-up urban planning philosophy herself, Jane Jacobs left New York's near-perfect West Village for Canada. Wouldn't life be better for me, my wife, and new daughter up there? Don't I owe it to them to create the best life circumstances for them?

Even if I can answer those questions with a resounding "yes," I still don't think it's right to leave the United States. Sure, in the worst case scenario, someone may look back on this essay someday the way we look at letters written progressive-minded Jews of 1920's Germany. It's not persecution that progressives have to fear from the future, but unwilling participation. It's not that we'll be singled out from the masses but that—through laziness or sheer lack of will—become part of them. That the choice between Hilary and McCain will just numb us or our children into passivity, and we will become the very thing we now live to defy.

From where I sit, however, escaping the United States for Canada is about as selfishly American an action I can imagine. All I'd really be doing is admitting defeat and leaving the scene of the crime. Instead of taking responsibility for what my sick nation is doing abroad as well as where it is leading its own people, I would be shrugging it off as someone else's problem, and leading my family towards greener pastures. I could even do something romantic—like head to some war-torn starving region and feed babies—even though I might be more helpful addressing the root causes here at home for some of the factors creating that situation. In

fact, being part of a dying civilization can be fun.

There's a lot of ways for an empire to decline, and like the arc of an orgasm, it doesn't have to be all bad or all destructive. Still, it's in that first moment of climax that we remember who it is we've actually been fucking (or fucking over) as well as the circumstances that got us there.

Being part of a dying civilization can be fun.

Any lying or exploitation involved confronts us in a rush. We are exposed—at least to ourselves, and usually to anyone else around. It is the moment of comeuppance.

But, like I'm suggesting, this does not have to be thought of as a bad thing at all. In fact—like the "9th Step" in A.A. where the recovering person has to go to each of his friends and admit all the shitty things he's done to them—it can be a really liberating thing. No more fronting. We can handle the truth.

The sweetest gift of decline, a far as America is concerned, is that we can finally give up the pretense of being the best at everything—the world's beacon and all that. Sure, it's nice for the world to have a role model and some sort of leadership, but we really aren't very good at that—and the cognitive dissonance between the way we present ourselves, our actions, and the way we feel about ourselves is leading to a schizoid national identity.


Besides, it's far better for the world and America to become siblings. At 200 years and change, we're the baby brother, anyway. Think of how much less stressful it would be to promote global peace in partnership with other nations instead of so unilaterally. (Admittedly, the United Nations is too corrupt and dysfunctional an institution to manage the world's crises, as well, but this is in large part because of American refusal

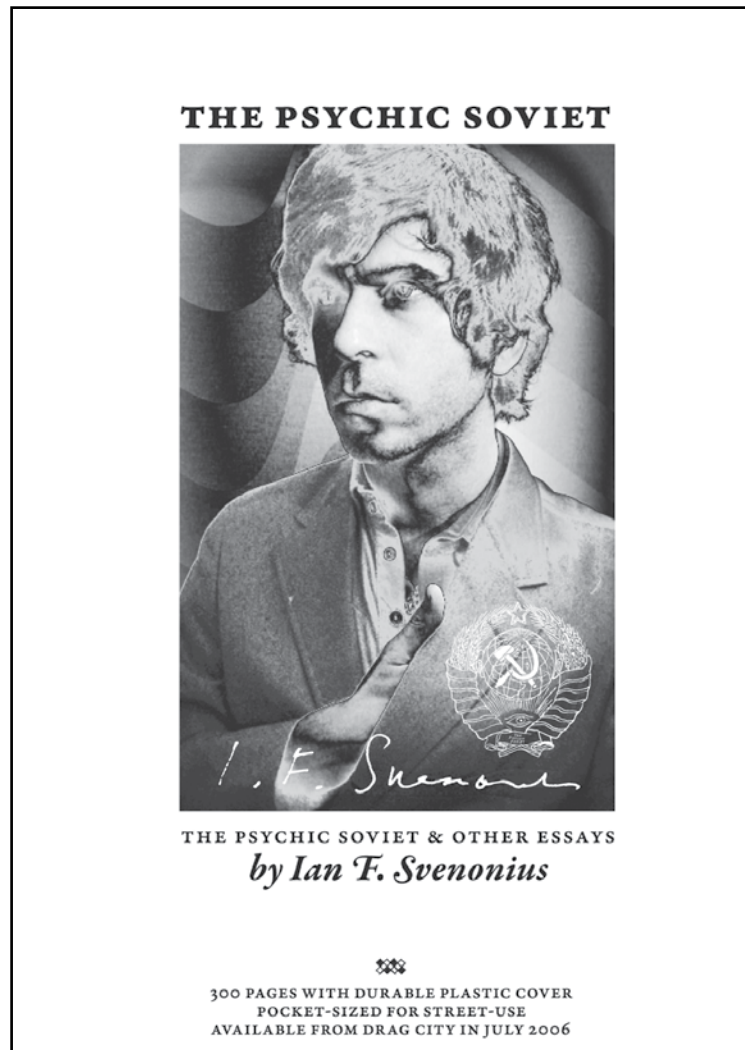
to offer support or cede authority to the very international institutions it helped devise.)

Like coming down off a particularly deluded acid trip, America's comedown must be handled as gently as possible. This could prove difficult in the face of ridicule and wrath from some of the nations and peoples we weren't very nice to on the way up. So like a school bully who has been revealed as less-than-invincible, we may have to suck it up and take the humiliation. But our response will be crucial to our finding an appropriate and fulfilling role in global affairs.

In short, we'll have to grow up. What feels like a fall will be, in actuality, our ascent to a more mature relationship to everyone around us. Just as we once matured from being a colony to becoming a colonizer ourselves, now we will face the bigger test of becoming a sustainable federation of states. Do we have enough to offer the rest of the world to justify what we ask in return? It will be our ingenuity and goodwill that wins us favor, instead of our military and economic prowess that enforces it.

This could make for some scary reckonings and a bit of collective writhing on our own petard, but it should also make for some interesting times. Level heads with positive visions and constructive solutions will be in short supply. It's too easy to abandon this place when the chips are down—and especially hypocritical to do so after a life spent eating Twinkies, watching Gilligan and burning oil.

The American experiment may have suffered a great setback, but I'm not ready to give up on it, particularly when the possibility for continuing it as something other than an empire is before us. The fat lady is indeed singing, but instead of running out of the theater to beat the traffic, I'm going to sit right here through the curtain call, tomatoes and all. After all that, the real and good work of cleaning up the mess we made of things will begin. 



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# Country Life

by  
Daniel Chamberlin  
photography by  
Eden Sotki

For the beatific country-soul musicians of **Brightblack Morning Light**, there's no place like Nature.

When they weren't slumming it with us youngsters at the all-ages hardcore shows, the older dudes at my Indiana high school would spend their week-end nights going "country cruisin', reminiscin." They'd all pitch in on a six-pack, score a dime-bag and then pile into somebody's old car—preferably a late '70s model sedan with stained plush upholstery and bench seating in front—and drive slowly down the deserted gravel roads and empty dirt tracks that criss-crossed the corn and soybean fields that spread for miles in every direction from the small town we called home. Though I never went on these sentimental rides—I was too young, pot-phobic and already knew that drunk-driving was trouble—I was in love with their soundtrack: long-form blues from the Allman Brothers and heartbroken redneck ballads from Lynyrd Skynyrd.

These days, I score my drives back from walks in the San Gabriel Mountains north of my home in Los Angeles with the same music, maybe a bit more Neil Young and Fairport Convention in the mix. It sets the tone for the silent trekking to come and eases the re-entry into the urban landscape on the way back down. The Grateful Dead's *American Beauty* and Will Oldham's *Ease Down The Road* are ideal albums to soundtrack trips to the deserts and mountains. I've added Brightblack Morning Light's new album of organic wilderness soul to the list of music perfect for such peaceful expeditions.

The two core members of Brightblack are Rachel "Rabob" Hughes, 29, and Nathan "Nabob" Shineywater, 30. Their self-titled debut for Matador Records has the dense harmonic blur of My Bloody Valentine but the music is made with the kind of instruments you'd expect to find the world famous session musicians—the Swampers—of Muscle Shoals putting to good use behind Aretha Franklin or Mavis Staples. (The album actually features two of the Staples Singers along with a trombone player from Nashville, Andy McLeod of White

Magic on bongos and Paz Lenchantin—the Argentinean-American multi-instrumentalist known for her work with A Perfect Circle, Silver Jews and Entrance—on guitar.) It's perfect for coming down from the mountains, and custom made for coming down on Sunday morning. It has an almost gospel feel—since soul music is just gospel without as much god—that invites comparisons to the lonely space-age-blues of Spaceman 3 or Spiritualized. But where Jason Pierce put opiates on the altar formerly occupied by the Holy Trinity, Brightblack has placed a respect for nature, an amalgam of environmental convictions and Native American spiritual practices.

Nabob's slide guitar work hangs in the dim lights of the stage, glowing and vibrating in the air. On his instrument, a wolf cub suckles at a woman's breast.

Which is sort of obvious from song titles like "A River Could Be Loved" and "We Share Our Blanket With The Owl."

Their live performance is as quiet and intimate—maybe even more so—than their album. The most recent incarnation of their touring band includes Oregonian Elias Reitz on congas and tablas and West Virginian Ben McConnell behind the kit, with their friend Mariee Sioux, who Nabob is careful to identify as a full-blooded Paiute, opening each show. They often bring sticks and other woodland artifacts onto the stage, erecting small lean-tos or tipi-like structures. All of it swirls and refracts in the rich, resinous sound of Rabob's Fender Rhodes organ. The vocal harmonies are chorus of whippers, while the brushed percussion is more of a sparkle than a clatter. The instruments are so quiet that cash registers at the bar interrupt the spell. Nabob's slide guitar work hangs in the dim lights of the stage, glowing and vibrating in the air. On his instrument, a wolf cub suckles at a woman's breast.

Up until now, Brightblack's music has been somewhat hard to come by, a word-of-mouth phenomena fueled by rumors about the band's nomadic lifestyle and enthusiastic reviews from the handful of crate-digging folk nuts who heard their debut LP, *Ala.Cali.Tucky*, or *Pebbles and Ripples*, a split EP with Will Oldham, that has the two avatars of rustic slow jams one-upping each other with covers of the Dead, Phil Ochs and show-stopping medleys of Bob Marley and Harry Nilsson. Then there were reports from the ecstatic few that caught the band in their Rainywater guise on various tours—centered around the band's interest in visiting hot springs—around the Southern half of the United States. And attendees of their hand-picked festivals in idyllic locations—the most recent being last January's Quiet Quiet Ocean Spell, an event where a hundred people gathered to see Brightblack, E!pers, Feathers



and Entrance play among the towering Sequoia sempervirens of Big Sur, CA. Another Big Sur event, Quiet Quiet Forest Spectrum, is scheduled for early August at the Henry Miller Library.

And, of course, the band's mythology wasn't hurt by the fact that Nabob and Rabob are said to live somewhere in the wilds of Marin County, just north of San Francisco. In a renovated chicken coop, no less.

As it happened, the happy Brightblack couple was en route from said coop to new digs in northern New Mexico when it came time to coordinate an interview. My first conversation with Nabob happens when he calls me at 10:30pm on a weeknight from a Northern Cali beach where he's setting up a tent. His voice is quiet but jolly with a heavy Southern twang. He wants to know if we can get together for the interview at a hot springs near the California-Arizona border. It's a clothing-optional place. "It's cool, they've got crystals and things all set up around the springs." He confers in muffled tones with Rabob, and then comes back. "Actually, why don't we meet up for a camp out in Joshua Tree?" Even better.



The drive out to the Mojave Desert from Los Angeles is one of the more dramatic urban exoduses one can make. The 10 Freeway is an auto-choked transportation corridor that winds through the Inland Empire's sprawling blocs of Soviet-meets-SoCal suburban housing developments. It's about as far from country cruisin' as you can get.

But the suburban blight ends abruptly at the San Gorgonio Pass. After that, there's nothing but highway signs with cryptic references to "other Desert Cities," shimmering plains of dirt and sand and hundreds of white windmills spinning silently in the hot breeze that whips through this gap between the San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains. Another hour of driving through wildflowers and sagebrush and we arrive at the Crossroads Cafe just north of the entrance to Joshua Tree National Park. Rabob and Nabob are parked out back.

A *Los Angeles Times* review of Brightblack's performance at ArthurBall described the couple as resembling "the hippies in a pot-themed episode of 'Dragnet.'" And while that's a snide way of putting it, it's also true that the two Alabamans are not afraid of appearing in dress appropriate to their rural bohemian lifestyle. Nabob is a tall, mustachioed man in a purple tie-dyed T-shirt and a leather headband. His hair is long and brown, some of it tangling up into dreadlocks in the back. A prominent belt buckle shaped like an upside-down American flag holds up his pants. Rabob emerges from their tour van, dressed in a subdued tank top tie-dyed a dark, brownish orange to match her dark brown skirt and the orange-tinted lenses of prescription aviator glasses. We exchange greetings and I stoop down to pet their dog, Lali. Nabob says she's named after a Hindu deity of some sort, and I nod as if I know what he's talking about.



Joshua Tree National Park is named after the ubiquitous *yucca brevifolia*, an evergreen tree unique to the Mojave Desert that is covered in spiny leaves and can grow to heights of nearly 30 feet. The indigenous Cahuilla tribes used the tree for baskets and sandals and chowed down on its

spring flowers. Mormon settlers christened the trees in honor of the Biblical prophet Joshua, and then proceeded to cut them down to fuel their mining machinery. It's where Gram Parsons and Keith Richards used to hang out, allegedly scanning the heavens for UFOs and coming up with weepy country-rock ballads. Parsons overdosed in the town of Joshua Tree in 1973, and his friends cremated him here in the park.

The forests of yuccas are beautiful and strange, but the real fun comes from the mountainous piles of monzogranite boulders that are spread across the landscape. Such rock formations have made Joshua Tree renown among professional rock climbers and amateur scrambling enthusiasts. We pull in next to one of the many impressive clusters of rocks in the park—the aptly named Jumbo Rocks campground—and pile out for the photo shoot.

As the sun settles into a bed of deep orange in the west, a full moon climbs through bands of lavender twilight in the east. The band's name comes from the same color of sky that happens just before dawn. We head out from our campsite into a valley between two gigantic piles of boulders that are glowing soft gold. Desert Cottontails are numerous from the recent rain. Lali looks like she's attained a state of canine nirvana, flushing the speedy young rabbits—along with the occasional quail—from beneath creosote bushes and ocotillo cacti. Rabob and Nabob talk about how the landscape reminds them of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* and the Louis L'Amour cowboy novels they've been reading. They stand on adjacent boulders and toss their Frisbee back and forth; they then strike poses using two sticks to frame a crystal that they've balanced on the stems of a tall cholla cactus. As the sun finally disappears, bats dart spastically above our heads and an owl cruises low through a sky just starting to twinkle with stars.

Once the sun has gone and the photos are finished, we all get into the Brightblack van and head back to town for dinner with friends who have invited us to hang out at their home studio. Nabob plays a mix CD: Aaron Neville, Beach Boys, and contemporary reggae dudes covering the Beatles. We're all a little high; Rabob leans forward and whispers, "Nabob honey, you've got your briz-ights on." He laughs and switches to the van's low beams.



Fred Drake and Dave Catching founded the Rancho de la Luna studio in 1993. Drake passed on in 2002, but Catching—a frequent cameo on Queens of the Stone Age albums, currently playing guitar with Eagles of Death Metal—lives there now, doing occasional recording work for friends with his neighbor Hutch, the QOTSA sound man. Hutch and his girlfriend Carol Anne host the dinner, which attracts a half-dozen high desert bohos. All the men wear long hair and bandanas and the women are covered in elaborate multi-colored tattoos. Some are full-time filmmakers and musicians, others put-up dry wall by day and spend their evenings working on the sort of outdoor sculptures that are only possible when you have a big yard. Hutch cooks up a carrot-ginger soup and grills pork loin on the back porch. "There aren't that many restaurants out here," he tells me, "so before long everybody learns to cook."

Rabob and Nabob look tired, but happy. Both long-time vegetarians, they dig into the soup, homemade bread and beer.

Before Rabob moved out West from Alabama, Nabob lived in the Northern California town of Arcata, the home of Earth First!, Humboldt State University, and the sort of place where hippies and hobos must make a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. He spent his time playing accordion on the town square and taking long hikes in the old-growth forests nearby. I've also spent some time in Humboldt County, and we both enthuse about KMUD, the public radio station with a penchant for bluegrass and keeping the local marijuana farming community abreast of current DEA helicopter flight patterns. "The show I always look forward to hearing is *New Dimensions*," says Nabob. It's a talk show that has been broadcast from Northern California since 1973. Their interviews with deep thinkers from a variety of disciplines—from beat poets to Nobel Laureate physicists—have made it somewhat legendary in public radio circles. "It connects me with all the righteous old back-to-the-landers," he says, "the real thinkers effected by the 1960s consciousness explosion, who mostly all left the city. KMUD saved me through their radio because it gave the stereo the truest community feeling I ever had."

After dinner we walk around the grounds of Hutch's house; a wood-fired hot tub sits out back, just around the corner from an automobile shed where he works on his vintage cars and trucks. There's also a sculpture of what looks like a blooming agave, the radiant flowers on its stem formed from dozens of empty Patron tequila bottles. It's all lit up in the cold blue light of the full moon.

These days Rancho de la Luna is more of Catching's house than a recording studio, but as the home of the Desert Sessions recordings—collaborative jams between QOTSA front man Josh Homme and pals like PJ Harvey, Mark Lanegan and Gene Ween—its place in desert rock history is secure. The interior is done up in a kind of Southwestern punk rock style, with rugs all over the floors and pictures of the horse that used to wander around the house on the walls. The bookshelves are packed; an especially queasy thrift-store portrait of a baby hangs over the table.

Rabob is here to check out the Rancho's extensive collection of keyboards, especially the vintage Fender Rhodes piano with a DynaMy-Rhodes attachment. I get lost in some of the shoptalk. Eventually Hutch, Nabob and I step outside and leave Rabob to examine the instrument.

Hutch retrieves a joint from an ashtray on the porch and we listen to the Rhodes' soft tones resonating from inside. The view from the patio takes in the mountains in the park with the modest skyline of Joshua Tree and Highway 62 in the foreground. Hutch shows us the fire pit where campfire sing-a-longs are sometimes recorded and used as final takes. Nabob says he'd like to record in Jamaica sometime, building tracks with reggae session players. We pause and just take in the sights, watching the lights of traffic down in the town. "That skyline is really psychedelic," he says. Nabob and I discuss our affection for the intensity that marijuana lends to time spent outdoors and wonder if we smoke too much. Eventually we walk back into the studio—quietly so as not to disrupt Rabob and the piano. "She was born to play that instrument," Nabob says.

The Rhodes is one of the most widely-recognized organs used in contemporary music: The

Doors' "Riders on the Storm," Stevie Wonder's "You Are The Sunshine of My Life," Miles Davis' *In A Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*. Its unique sound comes from rubber-tipped hammers striking small tuning forks inside the case. Herbie Hancock fell in love with it when Davis introduced it to him in 1967, and later recorded a promo spot for Fender, saying of their piano, "it had a blending quality that the acoustic piano doesn't have. The Rhodes piano blends so well with other instruments."

It's the same creamy blend that gives Brightblack's new album such a mellow campfire make-out vibe. Songs like the ten-minute-plus "Star Blanket River Child" are slow and dreamy, hot and humid because of this co-mingling of the sounds. The track starts with backtracked drums slithering through Nabob's woozy slide-guitar chords. A chorus moans in the background, more percussion jingles in the distance and underneath it all, the lush bed of Rabob's keys. About seven minutes in the brass pops up and repeats like multiple-orgasms until the whole thing collapses happily, exhausted and laughing. This is heavy music, but made with a slow hand and an easy touch. Rabob pulls the cover back down over the keys and we walk out into the moon to finish off the joint. Shortly after, we get back into the van and head back to the campground.

Once we're on the deserted roads in the park, Nabob puts on a Sandy Bull CD. Bull was a virtuoso on multiple stringed instruments, creating long winding epics of oud, guitar and banjo. We're listening to one of Bull's early '70s recordings where he's playing with jazz drummer, Billy Higgins. The coupling of the polyrhythmic fingerpicked blues ragas with the rush of Joshua Trees and rock piles is completely hypnotic. We turn the van's headlights off and ghost-ride at 25 mph to the light of the full moon, everyone silent except to whisper warnings of mice, rabbits and other small mammals dashing across the road in front of us. Desert cruising, reminiscing.

We arrive back at the campsite around midnight. With Lali asleep in the van, Nabob, Rabob and I walk up over a small ridge and back down to the valley where we were cavorting earlier. The moonlight is bright enough to read by, and we stand looking down through seemingly endless piles of ancient rocks.

"I wonder how far we could walk," asks Nabob, "if we just kept going."

We sit down on a granite slab and wrap up in sweaters. Nabob pulls out a small bag of the collector's choice sativa he purchased from the Marin Cannabis Club before they left. He says that this strain is called Sourdough, and the pungent, yeasty smell of the smoke shows us why.

Nabob and Rabob have been living in the country outside Point Reyes Station, a small community of around 1,000 people that sits on the coast an hour north of San Francisco, for the last three years. It's the entry point to the Point Reyes National Seashore, 70,000 acres of woodlands and beaches that have been under federal protection since 1962. Philip K. Dick lived there from 1958 through 1964. It's the place where he got heavily into the *I Ching* and wrote *The Man in the High Castle*, *We Can Build You* and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*.

"When we were in Point Reyes Station making all the music we were recording," Nabob says, "Rachel and I were also participating in a combi-

nation of marijuana and walking. Much as we are right now. And we did that for three years around the National Seashore. Got to know the land and the animals, got to know the wilderness as, like, a family. This clean, wild energy."

The couple was studying the work of Jaime DeAngulo, an eccentric turn-of-the-century cowboy turned linguist, known for his anthropological research into the music, folklore and spiritual practices of the Paiute, Pit River and Achumawi Indian tribes of Northern California. "Their religion was based solely on walking alone for days, without a specific destination until they made contact with their Spirit Animals," says Nabob. "I say 'mildly studying,' we listened to and read DeAngulo for pleasure mostly. But these specific tribe's methods gave credence to our intentions of enhancing our own spirits by taking daily walks into the Point Reyes National Seashore area ... usually alone. Rabob would camp alone on the beach many times. I would go follow animal trails for a long time."

## "I wonder how far we could walk," asks Nabob, "if we just kept going."

Nabob credits his 13 years of vegetarianism with suppressing his "hunter mind," setting the animals more at ease with his presence. He says marijuana helped him hand his "male mind over to the ways of Earth Life." Though the three of us are getting deeper into conversation, we're not looking at each other. Rather, we're facing the monzogranite pile across the valley, silently studying the nooks and crannies that have become yawning caves of shadow that ebb and wane with the moon's position in the sky. "You don't have to create mystery out here," says Nabob. "There's mystery already here and you're participating in it."

The chicken coop they were living in had been renovated into more of a cabin, with bunk beds and such. But that it was still smaller than the rock we were currently sitting on. "We put up tents in the summertime," says Rabob. At the time she was working with various environmental groups on watershed restoration projects, a job that put her in touch with a lot of people in the community. Through her connections they were invited to use a small country church as their practice space.

They had 13 redwood trees growing in their yard, and a creek nearby that still had Coho salmon running through it. "It was a great campfire spot," says Nabob, "and we could jam whenever we wanted." They both tell stories about riding bikes up the mountain behind their cabin and swimming in the reservoir up on top. "There were these logs floating around in the water, and I'd ride them everyday. Paddle around on the logs, lay down on 'em..."

"I remember the first time you came home after riding the logs," says Rabob, laughing. "He was just so bright and happy. I was like, 'What's going on dude?'"

"At the time we were getting all of our ganja from the Marin Cannabis Club," says Nabob. "Which specializes in these things called Chilly Walters, this ganja chocolate thing. It has a stamp on the chocolate of a penguin with

dreadlocks and his eyes halfway open. And then it has a sticker on the lid that says ..."

"Chilly Walter, Irie Penguin!" Rabob exclaims, laughing.

"Those things were five bucks," says Nabob. "You could eat a quarter of it and be stoned all day, like phew! Five bucks!"

Nabob left Alabama for California in the mid-'90s. His friends were starting to dabble in heavy drugs and he says he could see people heading for a bad place. Around the same time he came across an article in a '70s-era issue of *National Geographic* about Humboldt County in Northern California, a land of old growth redwoods, libertarian ranchers, back-to-the-land hippies and some of the most ruggedly beautiful coastline in North America. Before long he was Humboldt-bound.

"That was like the eighth time you left Alabama," says Rabob. It took her a bit longer to realize that she wanted to leave the South. Rabob grew up in Montevallo, a small town in central Alabama, and the home of the University of Montevallo, a public liberal arts college. She was working for AmeriCorps, a network of non-profit organizations, and hating it. "I really wanted to be ... I don't know, to live closer to the land," she says. "I thought a different landscape would wake me up. I just felt this pull to the West Coast and the ocean. I'd already planned to move and then I met Nathan. Very shortly after that there was talk of all of us leaving Alabama.

"I think coming out here to live had something to do with the places we went to on our first tour with Will Oldham," she continues. "I felt a spiritual vibe to the woods, creation, back in Alabama, but the land feels more ancient out here. People care, too. California's not perfect at all, but there's more of a collective consciousness about it."

She brings up *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Edward Abbey's 1975 novel that laid the blueprint for aggressive environmental activism and sabotage [*speaking of which—see page 27-Ed.*]. Rabob quotes one of the characters on the necessity of the peace and quiet of nature. "He talks about people going insane without it. I feel that way sometimes."She describes Montevallo as a totally different world from Nabob's home in southern Alabama. "I grew up with my grandfather preaching every Sunday in a rural Baptist church, until I was 9," says Nabob. "We sang together the old hymns with a piano, his congregation were all old peanut farmers with missing teeth, but their hearts were full of love and the singing was full of love. Yet we always drove past another church on our way to this church, an Afro-American church. I couldn't understand why we all were not gathered together. Later when I found out about the details of segregation I knew that all matters of the spirit could only be gained and applied as an individual. That generally all organized religion is basically more a social path rather than a spiritual path. Keep in mind that I grew up in an all-black community. This separation was profound to me!" This realization was the genesis of his interest in what he calls "indigenous spirituality."

"I learned that all folks, regardless of their bloodline or color of skin were indigenous to the Earth before the claw of industrialism injected a death ghost into humanity. It is up to us as individuals to decide if the lessons from Earth Spirit are worthy of our time and effort. For





Rabob quotes one of the characters on the necessity of the peace and quiet of nature. “He talks about people going insane without it. I feel that way sometimes.”

me, I had no choice, I knew that the Bible was written by the hand of man, and while it holds some value to me, it is still of human derivation, therefore, not to be trusted for my spirit’s healings ... though I think if it were written from a non-Anglo stance, we might have a truer window to the events that went on. As Leonard Cohen said ‘Though we read from pleasant Bibles that are bound in blood and skin, the wilderness is gathering all its children back again.’

“I think I just needed something to work, to actually work,” he says. “I kept looking for things in humankind that would offer something that would be a go-to no matter what.”

Neither Rabob nor Nabob seems eager to talk about their families, only saying that they’re on their own financially, surviving off the money they make from playing live. Nabob tells me his parents have split up. That his mother is crazy and his father “raises cows and grows dope.” He talks to him from time-to-time, but hasn’t seen him in going on seven years; he doesn’t feel at home around his stepmother and their new family. “I guess we’re talking about the blues now,” he says. We sit quietly for a few moments and pass around a jug of water.

The two met back in Alabama through mutual friends, band connections, but Nabob says they didn’t hang out that much before Rabob moved West. “I’ve gotten to know her as a person camping out, going hiking,” he says.

Part of my interest in talking with Brightblack comes from an intermittent desire to leave the city without going off the deep end into rural solitude. While the two of them clearly put a premium on time spent alone in the wilderness, their music is informed by urban sounds, classic soul music like Curtis Mayfield, and their fellow travelers in the psychedelic folk scene, as much as by wilderness nomads like the Sahara desert bluesmen and women of Tinariwen. And as artists who appreciate collaborative projects, they seem to seek a balance between living alone, far from the urban centers where artists often congregate, and maintaining ties with those communities. I wonder what keeps them from

completely cutting their ties with what they call “Babylon,” of going off the grid and leading a quiet country life.

“There’s a plethora of good people,” says Nabob. “That alone. It’s interesting to know about the good things going on, the bands making records.”

“It’s a snowball thing,” says Rabob. “It starts from inside. You wanna hear [the music] through your instrument. Then coming through speakers. That takes time to do that. Then you’re not spending time working a day job. It snowballs into this thing where we needed to get supported to make this thing happen. We wanted to have southern gospel singers, a trombone player. We wanted to go to Nashville to work with Mark Nevers. All those things are gonna take somebody supporting it. And now we’ve got Matador’s backing.”

“It’s hard,” Rabob says of the challenges of bringing people out to their remote living places. “There’s a lot of driving to get to those rural places. And that driving means gas. But it’s worth it. It’s all worth it. But when you play music with people that live in the city, you’ve gotta make it worth their while to come out.”

“I’ll say this,” says Nabob. “Professional musicians are bad-ass. They don’t fuck around and they’re not going to return if I’m all stoned and inviting them to come out to the house. What they’re spending their time doing has gotta be worth a shit.”

Nabob gets up and walks across the granite slab we’ve been sitting on to piss off the edge. He casts a long black shadow on the rock, which is radiant and white in the moonlight. He comes back and our conversation drifts to sentimental talk of the South. He and Rabob once recorded on some of the equipment that Lynyrd Skynyrd used to record “Sweet Home Alabama.” Nabob wonders if people not from the South would understand what that meant to him. I mention my favorite Skynyrd song, “Gimme Three Steps.” It’s a story about being a longhaired hippie-like dude dancing with a girl named Linda Lou at a place called The Jug, and

the confrontation with her armed, jealous lover. The song ends with the hippie turning tail and running screaming from the place—the three steps of the song’s title, of course. “It’s still hard, if you’re a guy, to have long hair in the South,” says Rabob.

“Even though when I talk, the Alabama accent is there,” says Nabob, “I am a Western person because I believe what hasn’t been destroyed of the American West’s wilderness is worthy of defending from resource extraction. I think the only people that should be allowed in the American West are those who respect the Earth; if they want to play another game, let them do it on the East Coast where everything is already polluted.

We must resist Babylon System each moment of each day,” he says, energized. “I guess,” he smiles and laughs, “although I admit I’m just a stoner.”

We sit quietly again for a while and listen to a screech owl hunting the valley. Then we gather up our water and I shut my tape recorder off. That night, I lay out on the desert floor without a tent. It’s often hard for me to fall asleep outside—I love the “wild energy” that Nabob was talking about and I can’t shut my eyes to the landscape. The screech owl calls again from somewhere off in the distance, and a meteorite streaks across the sky.

A few days later, I get an email from Nabob.

“The Sangre De Cristo Mountains are in the back yard, a roadless wilderness area,” it reads. “The past three days have been spent on day hikes into the foothills, where we found a pond and a stream for swimming. I did read that in the ‘70s the locals made effigies of some of the hippys out here trying to protect the Mexican Spotted Owl. The effigies they placed in their own yards & it showed each hippy hanging to death. The locals were cutting the old trees for firewood to sell.

“We are all separated by four- to ten-acre plots. There are Coyote, Bear, Wolf and Western Blue Jay all around. The adobe is wonderful & the music sounds good since it is mostly empty in here. Everything is orange! The elevation is 7,000 feet and I still haven’t gotten used to it. I pass out hard each nite.

“I am physically nearer to the Hopi & Navajo, etc than I have ever been. Unlike the high-desert tribes I align with, who are now extinct, these Pueblo people still have their own Nations!

“Anyhow, we are excited to be into this practice of walking and also have a publishing contract for music. I am not sure of the motives of many folks who play music, under any circumstance. I am not sure if people hear any of these things, or even want to. I do know that when folks gather to be a student rather than a teacher, then we all learn & grow. Maybe that’s why the high-desert tribes ways are so attractive, because there was no hierarchy when it came to religion.

“I think it’s important to demolish all hierarchy when it comes to creativity & Spirituality. It is up to the common folks to maintain a steady demolition. This way the things that are learned are of a universal value.

“The place we sat with you was such an ancient place. It really will be a good memory, the land and the conversations.”

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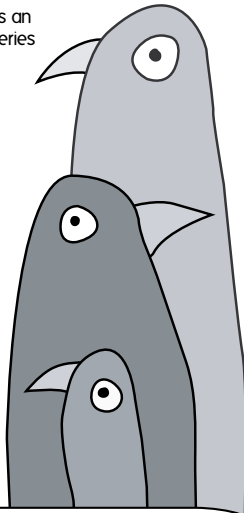
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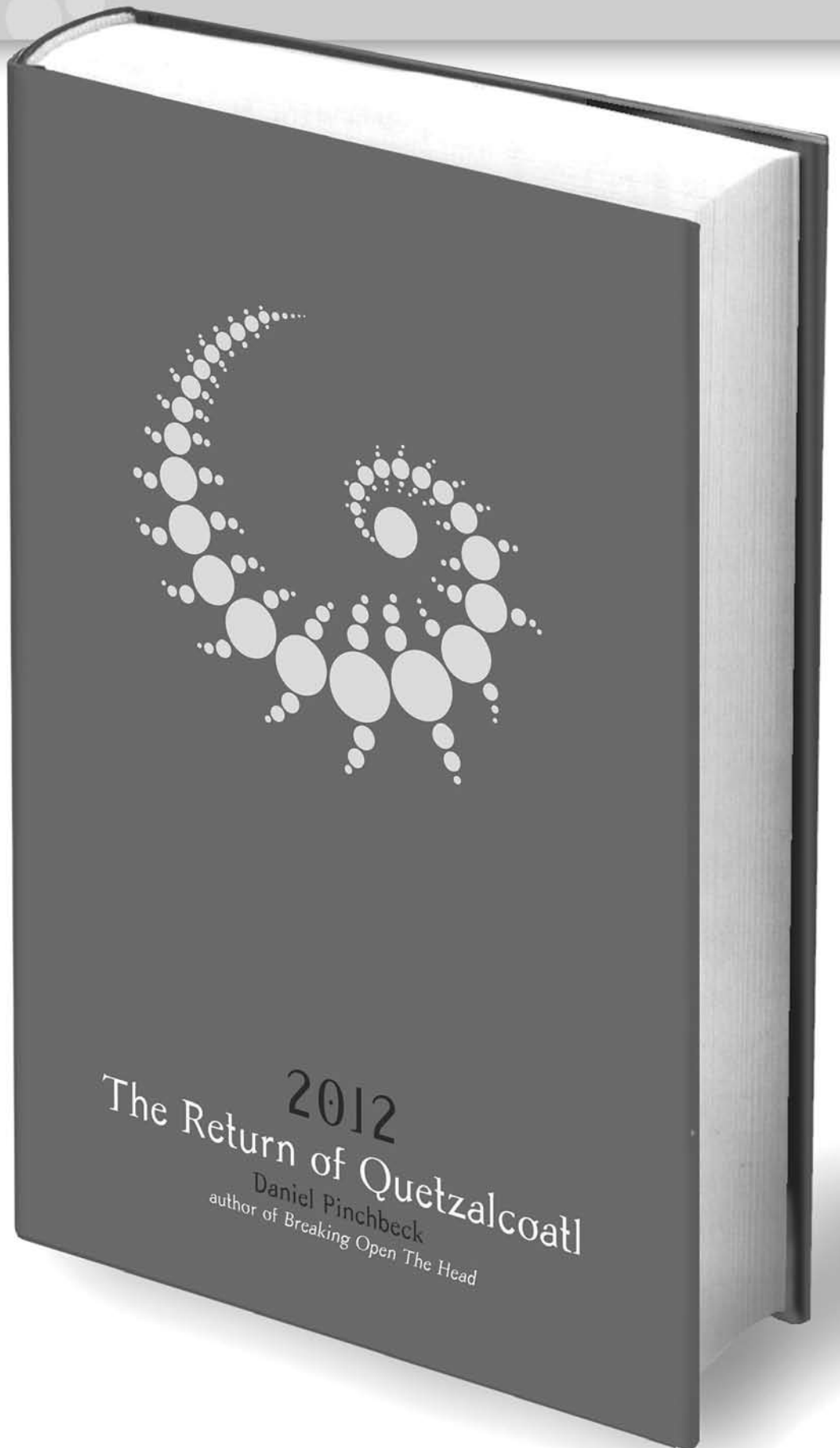


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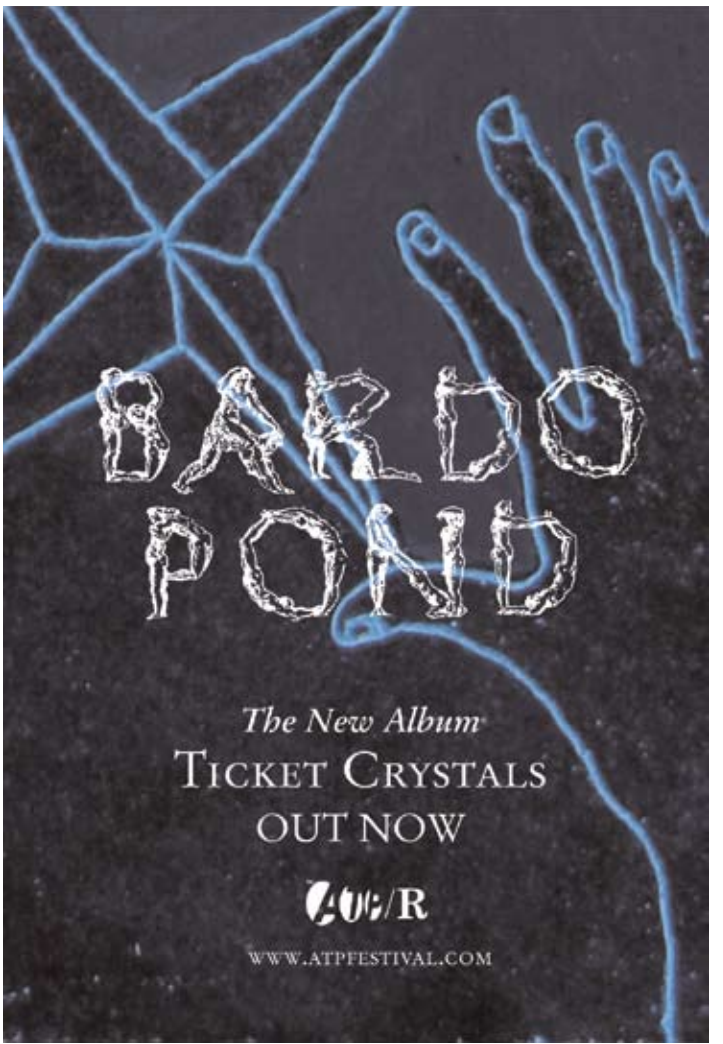
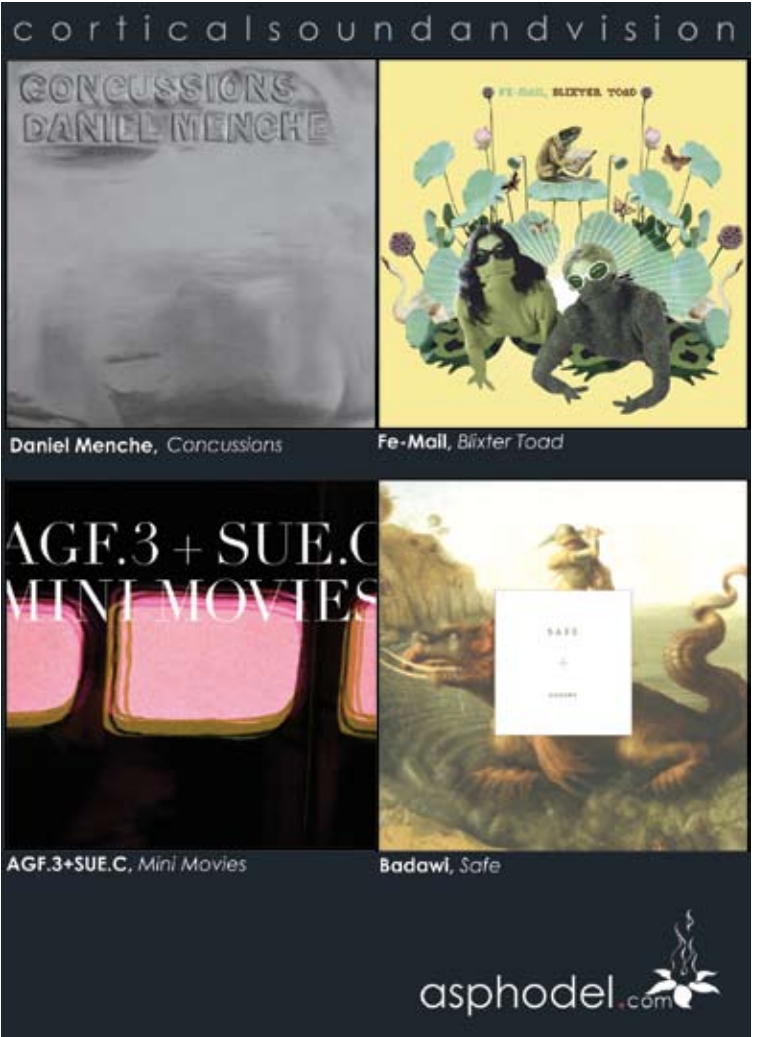
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**Derrick Jensen**  
explains why civilization  
needs to end—now.

by  
**Jay Babcock**  
photography by  
**Shayla Hason**

One day in 1987 Derrick Jensen was browsing the public library when he came across a book that changed everything.

"*The Natural Alien* by Neil Evernden exploded my worldview," says Jensen, on the phone from his home on the Northern California coast not far from the Oregon border. "There's a great line in there where Evernden makes an impassioned defense of some creature and somebody says, Well what good is it? And Evernden says the only response you can give is, Well what good are you? Not to make them feel bad but to show them that if you judge something solely by its utility to you, you ignore most of its being."

"It was the first book I ever read that talked about the basic stupidity of the utilitarian worldview."

In his new book *Endgame*, Jensen argues that civilization—the utilitarian worldview put into practice—is not only stupid, it's terminal. All forms of human civilization have historically worked to steadily exhaust the planet's non-renewable resources, he says; therefore, no amount of technological ingenuity, no amount of political reform, no amount of Al Gore documentaries or carpool lanes or farmers' markets or solar credits or biodiesel vehicles or Daryl Hannah in a tree will ever adequately replace what civilization has consumed

in order to sustain itself, much less invert its fundamental imperative to use up the planet.

These are tough, hard-to-swallow ideas, the kind that we've heard in recent decades via controversial figures like Ted Kaczynski (aka The Unabomber), University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill and anarcho-primitivist theorist John Zerzan. But there's a reason Jensen has gained a sizeable following through his books, talks and interviews. What he brings to the table is a passionate directness, a command of the facts, and most of all, an ability to make a personal, poignant appeal not just for action, but for a mercy killing. He's clearly a guy who won't just let it go because he can't let it go; he's stayed up all night, doing some serious heavy lifting on all the inconvenient truths—the hopeless doomsday statistics, the possibility of imminent system crash—that the rest of us try to forget as we stumble to bed.

Of course he could've saved himself some of the trouble; at 900-plus pages, *Endgame* is far too long and rambling to be the definitive anarcho-primitivist text that its title and scope suggest. Still, it's packed with provocative ideas that can explode your worldview, and so, in late April, I talked with Derrick about the ideas in *Endgame* that had provoked the most discussion around the *Arthur* office.



photo by Miss Jess Keating



Why does civilization need to be brought down now?

Derek Jensen: A few years ago, I began to feel pretty apocalyptic but I didn't want to use that word because it's so loaded. And then a friend, George Draffan, said, 'So Derrick, what's it gonna take for you to finally use that word? Give me a specific threshold, Derrick, a specific point at which you'll finally use that word. Will it take global warming? The ozone hole? The reduction of krill populations off Antarctica by 90 percent? How about the end of the great coral reefs? The extirpation of 200 species per day? 400? 600? Will it take the death of the salmon?' And I thought about that. Salmon were once so thick around here that you couldn't see the bottom of the river. You could hear the runs coming from miles before you'd see them. People were afraid to put their boats in the water for fear they'd capsize. And now, when I go out to Mill Creek, I start crying because I see two salmon spawning.

This civilization is killing the planet. They say that one sign of intelligence is the ability to recognize patterns. I'm gonna lay out a pattern here and let's see if we can recognize it in less than 6,000 years. When you think of the hills and plains of Iraq, do you normally think of cedar forests so thick the sunlight never touches the ground? That's how it was before. The first written myth of this culture is that of Gilgamesh deforesting that area to make cities. Plato complained that deforestation was drying up springs and destroying the water quality in Greece. The forests of North Africa went down to make the Phoenician and Egyptian navies. We can go north and ask, Where are the lions who were in Greece? Where are the indigenous of Europe? They've been massacred, or assimilated—in any case, genocide was perpetrated against them by definition because they're no longer there.

If you start asking questions, the questions just keep moving back and back and back. This is a pattern that's been going on for a long, long time. This culture has been unsustainable from the beginning. On a finite planet, you would think that we would think about that. You can't exploit a planet and live on it too. At this stage, since there are no new frontiers to exploit, the planet's falling apart.

So you genuinely believe the planet is nearing death?

Well, what measure do you want to use to determine the planet's health? The climate is changing. 90% of the large fish in the oceans are gone. Phytoplankton populations are collapsing. Each summer a dead zone covers 8000 square miles in the Gulf of Mexico. Another blankets Chesapeake Bay. Another the Baltic Sea. Altogether, there are almost 150 dead zones, places where the water contains too little oxygen to sustain life. This number has doubled each decade since the 1960s. The cause? Industrial agriculture. Seabird populations are collapsing off the UK. American chestnuts are gone. The cod are effectively gone. Passenger pigeons used to fly in flocks so large they darkened the sky for days at a time. Same with Eskimo curlews. They're gone. And do you know why there are no penguins in the northern hemisphere? Because they were eradicated. The great auk. Prior to the arrival of this culture they were present in unimaginable numbers. One of the early French explorers commented that you could fill every ship in France with them and it wouldn't make a dent. The last one was killed in the nineteenth century.

The grizzly bears that are on the California state flag, they're essentially gone. I mean, somebody could certainly say, There's still a tree standing, obviously things are okay. But that's obviously an insane position. Nonetheless people keep taking it. That's why I keep saying, Give me a threshold. At what point will you finally say that the oceans are getting hammered. If it's not 90% of the large fish gone, is it 93%? 95%? 100%? How acidified does it have to get? What percent of the coral reefs have to die before we admit there's a problem, and more importantly, do something about it? Give me a threshold.

We can choose whatever measure we want, and we find that stuff is falling apart. That shouldn't surprise us. It's just like any other relationship. If you have a girlfriend, do you believe you can sort of mercilessly exploit her and beat the hell out of her and cut her up and then expect for her to be able to maintain a relationship? Of course, given the rates of domestic violence, there are a lot of men who believe this too.

Why is it bad that certain species go extinct? Is it because all species have an inherent value and right to existence, or is it because they are useful to the ecosystem, and it's their utility that we're losing?

Well, it's all of those. First, obviously salmon and sturgeon and smelt and migratory songbirds, they all... It's simply WRONG to exterminate them. They are beautiful and wonderful beings on their own. The purpose of salmon is to be salmon. The purpose of forests is to be forests. That's really critical. Second, forests suffer tremendously without the existence of salmon. Salmon provide a tremendous influx of nutrients into the forest. They put on about 95 percent of their weight in the ocean, and carry this weight into the forest and die. When the salmon come in, it's time for a feast. In the Pacific Northwest, 66 different vertebrates eat salmon. Between industrial fishing, dams, industrial forestry, and the other ways the civilized torment and destroy salmon, and rivers in the Northwest starve: they only receive about six percent of the nutrients they did a century ago. Natural communities can only undergo so much stress. After that they collapse.

And yet civilization keeps chugging along, despite the deforestation and extinctions. People seem to believe that everything will work out via new technology or the system balancing itself out, even if they don't know exactly how.

There's something called carrying capacity, which is the number of any given species that a certain area can support permanently. Certainly populations can overshoot carrying capacity—you can have an island that can support a thousand deer forever but if you put 10,000 deer on it they're gonna eat too much vegetation, they're gonna cause erosion, they're gonna permanently reduce carrying capacity. You can temporarily exceed carrying capacity, which is clearly what's happening here.

There's a machine image that Paul Ehrlich or somebody was using about how you have this airplane and you have rivets popping off the airplane. You keep saying I'm not worried about it. Well, eventually enough rivets are gonna come off that the wing's gonna fall off and the plane is going to go down.

This way of thinking, that if we just ignore the problems, things are going to be okay, is really really easy, and it's one of the things the Nazis used to great effect. At every step of the way, it was in the Jews' rational self-interest not to resist. Because they kept pretending that things couldn't get worse. So, would you rather get an ID card, or resist and possibly get killed? Do you want to get on a cattle car or do you want to resist and possibly get killed? Do you want to take a shower, or resist and possibly get killed? At every step of the way they could talk themselves into not resisting. Zygmund Baumann has this great line, this is a direct quote, that "rational people will quietly meekly go into gas chambers if only you allow them to believe they're bathrooms." It's the same thing. Rational people will go quietly and meekly to the end of the world if you'll only allow them to believe that the salmon don't matter.

So your argument is that the sooner civilization falls, the better—not just for animals and plants, but for humans.

If someone had brought down civilization, whatever that means, 200 years ago, people who live in the eastern US could still eat passenger pigeons and Eskimo curlews. People

in the West, in the Northwest, could still eat salmon. I live on Tolowa land. The Tolowa Indians lived where I live now for at least 12,500 years if you believe the myths of science. If you believe the myths of the Tolowa, they've lived here since the beginning of time. When this culture arrived here a couple hundred years ago, the area was, as was true of so much of this continent, just ridiculously fecund. The indigenous peoples could have lived here essentially forever, so far as we know—12,500 years is long enough for me to call it 'sustainable.' If civilization had come down 200 years ago, the people who live here would still be able to support themselves. But if it comes down in another 30 years, 50 years, 60 years, a hundred years, 10 years, whatever, the people who live here—who live in this place right here—won't be able to eat salmon. At some point the current system is going to crash, and there are going to be people sitting along the banks of the Columbia, which will be glowing from the radiation at Hanford, and they will be saying, "I'm starving to death because you didn't remove the dams that were killing salmon. God damn you."

So, even from the purely selfish human perspective, yeah, it would be good for civilization to end. The sooner this civilization goes the better, because there'll be *more left*.

Can you honestly tell Joe and Jane Sixpack that they'd be better off if this civilization were suddenly gone?

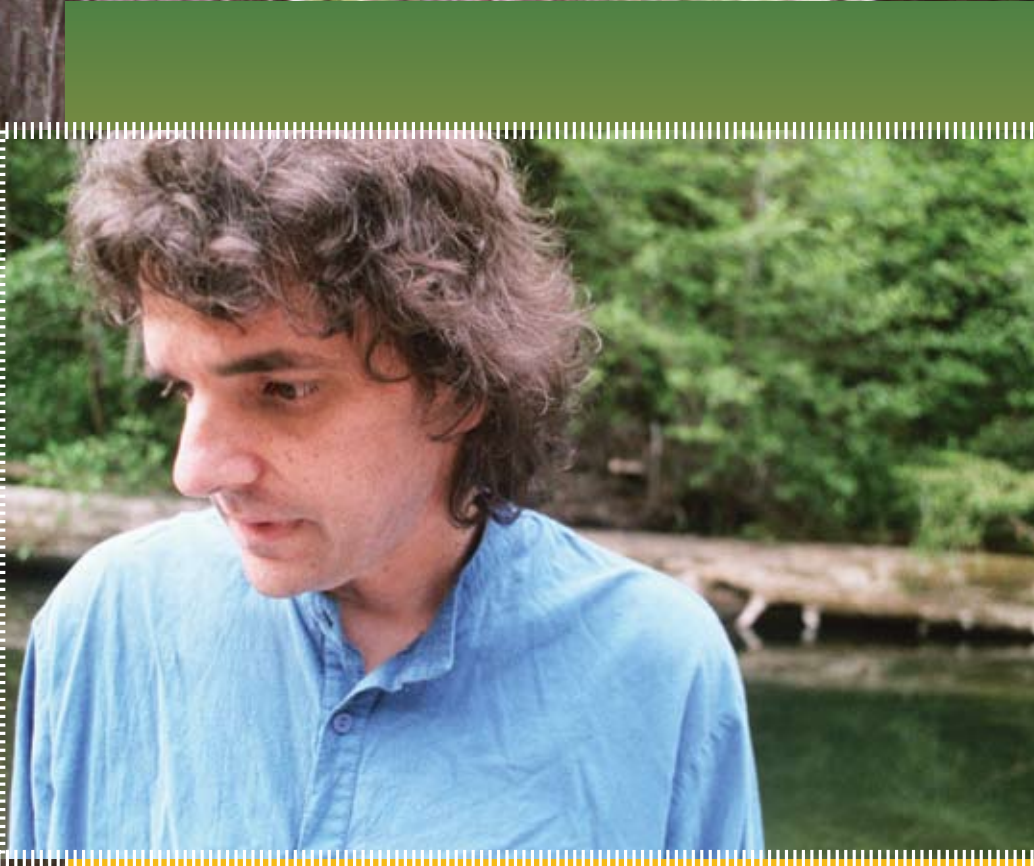
My audience is generally people who recognize that the system is really messing things up, and I want to push them harder, as some people have pushed me harder. That said, I guess it depends on how "Joe Sixpack" defines himself. I used to have this habit of asking people if they liked their jobs. About 90% say no. Most people work jobs they don't love to buy stuff they don't want to live lives that are pretty unhappy, etc etc. This culture is killing the planet, and it isn't even making most of us happy. Also, I often ask people at my talks, How many of you have had someone you love die of cancer? Usually about 70-80% say yes. The air in Los Angeles is so toxic that children born there inhale more carcinogenic pollutants in the first two weeks of their lives than the EPA (which routinely understates risks so as not to impede economic production) considers safe for a lifetime. In San Francisco it takes about three weeks.

Of course cancer is a disease of civilization, made far worse by the toxification of our entire environment. I have Crohn's disease, which is a disease of civilization. I know people who have MS, which is a disease of civilization. My mom has diabetes. That's another part of my argument against civilization: it's toxifying our own bodies. There's dioxin in every mother's breast milk. It's not just salmon. It's all of us.

Yes, but couldn't you say the same civilization gives us medicine and modern, miracle-working health care? Don't civilized peoples, on balance, come out ahead of pre-industrial hunter-gatherer societies?

I have a bunch of responses. The first is that modern medicine—available to the rich, not the global poor—is horribly ironic, in that industrial health care is one of the most toxic industries on earth. It produces PVC medical devices to treat someone's cancer, then puts them in the hospital incinerator to send back out and give someone else cancer. Or uses mercury in thermometers in the hospital, then send that up the incinerator to be deposited in fish and to eventually give more children—human and nonhuman—brain damage. Where does this make sense? Modern industrial medicine cures the cancer of some rich American who became sick because of the toxification of the total environment, and these processes lead to even more toxification, causing yet more poor people—and nonhumans—to die. The real wonder of modern medicine is that the poor buy into this at all.

There's also some sleight-of-hand there. Part of that is there's a really high infant mortality among wild humans,



Shouldn't be much longer now: Derrick Jensen waits for the system to crash.

as there is among a lot of wild creatures. If you make it to 4-5 years old in the wild, you make it a long way. Read *Health and the Rise of Civilization* by Mark Nathan Cohen, a forensic archaeologist.

Thirdly, people who think bringing down civilization would bring mass misery are ignoring that this is what's already happening! It's just that most of us don't see it. There are people dying right now, starving to death in India, now, because of the global economy. Seventy-eight percent of the countries reporting child malnutrition export food. During the much-publicized famine in Ethiopia during the 1980s, that country exported green beans to Europe. During the infamous potato famine, Ireland exported grain to England (and part of the reason the potato blight took hold in the first place was that the Irish were pushed to the poorest land). The famines come a lot of the time because a) people have been dispossessed, b) the land they were on is now used for cash crops for export and c), the water's been stolen for semiconductor plants or aluminum smelters or whatever. The current system is *already* enslaving them and exploiting them. Several years ago I asked Anuradha Mittal, former executive director of Food First, if the people of India be better off if the world economy disappeared tomorrow. She laughed and said, Of course. One of the examples she gave is there are former granaries in India that now export dog food and tulips to Europe. These are people who are dying *right now*.

Water is a great example of the world economy killing people. People say the world's running out of water? The thing is, 90% of the planet's drinkable water is used for agriculture and industry. People are dying of thirst in India right now because the groundwater is being used to make Coca-Cola. This *whole* lifestyle is based on exploitation.



So what I'm really talking about when I'm talking about bringing down civilization is depriving the rich of their ability to steal from the poor, and depriving the powerful of their ability to destroy the planet. I don't think there's many people who would not be behind that. Then everything else is just tactics, you know? The question becomes one of targeting.

**In Endgame, you talk about specific actions that can be taken by individuals or small groups that could bring civilization down immediately. You discuss E-bombs: devices that destroy electronics, cause no harm to humans and, according to the September 2001 issue of Popular Mechanics, can be built for \$400. Are you really advocating the use of these weapons?**

Before we go there, I have to say that my emphasis is not on technologies or on particular tactics or actions. My point is that we need to recognize that this way of life is killing life on the planet, and we need to stop it. After that it's kind of like the old line by JFK about those who make nonviolent revolution impossible make violent revolution inevitable. Let's stop this by the most peaceful means possible. But in the end let's stop this, because there is nothing worse than planetary murder. Nothing.

"We also need to recognize that those in power are not going to give up their stranglehold because we ask nicely." They won't stop exploiting the poor and deforesting because we circulate an online petition." We need to recognize that. And we need to recognize that Harriet Tubman carried a gun. Now that she's long dead she can be a hero, but if she were alive now she's be wanted for theft ("stealing" slaves) and terrorism. Geronimo had a gun. Tecumseh had a gun.

I'm not saying that people should willy-nilly pick up guns or that everyone should go drop E-bombs everywhere. I'm saying we need to have our seriousness called into question. What do we want? Do we want smaller clearcuts, kinder clearcuts, fewer clearcuts? Do we want the Giants to win the World Series and oh, by the way, it would be nice if we still have a world? Do we want to keep our cars and computers and lawns and grocery stores even at the expense of life on the planet? More to the point, do we want to allow others to keep their cars and computers and lawns and grocery stores even at the expense of life on the planet, which of course includes at the expense of poor humans? Even more to the point, do we want to allow those in power to perpetuate this system at the expense of the poor and life on the planet.

Bringing down civilization is not a monolithic act. It's a billion different acts done by a billion different people. First, it's recognizing that this culture is killing the planet. Next it's realizing we can do something to stop it. Next it's finding what you love. And next, it's determining to act to defend your beloved. Everything after that is tactics.

And every different action has a different morality. It would be outrageously immoral to set off an E-bomb at a hospital. But on the other hand I think it's almost impossible to make a moral case against taking out cell phone towers, which kill between five and 50 million migratory songbirds every year. If one

cares about migratory songbirds—or if you care about not having the jerk at the next table yammer on about his latest financial conquest while you're trying to eat, or if you care about the EMF waves which might or might not be dangerous—then it's impossible to make a moral case against taking out those towers.

**If E-bombs are so easy to make, why hasn't one been detonated since Popular Mechanics put them on their cover?**

I have no idea. That's a good question. Except of course they have been detonated: by the US military, which tests and produces them.

I wonder that about a lot of things. Years ago—and before I say this I have to make absolutely clear that in no way am I even in the slightest advocating this—I was talking to a genetic engineer who said it's really a piece of cake to make genetically modified diseases—all you really needed was three graduate students and a \$100,000 laboratory, which is no big deal. He was stunned that it hadn't happened yet. Once again, both of us are opposed to this, and were surprised no one has done it yet.

Another important thing to say about taking down civilization is that even before we get to the E-bomb stage there is a lot of other work to be done. And a lot of this work is not tremendously dramatic. A guy at one of my talks said, "I wanna go to China and take out a dam but I can't do that 'cause it'll kill villagers below." Of course that comment ignores the villages destroyed by the erection of the dams. I responded, "Look before we even talk about this, of the two million dams in the United States, probably three-quarters of a million of them are tiny, illegal, not serving any economic function, and the only reason they're standing is because of inertia. Nobody's bothered to take them out. If you want to take out a dam, go take out one of these. Not even the cops will care." The point is that we can get all excited about doing underground illegal stuff, but there's a tremendous amount of entirely legal work we're not doing.

The whole reform vs revolution question is bullshit. I used to teach creative writing at Pelican Bay, which is a Supermax security prison. I fully recognized that every time I walked in to that prison that I was participating in the biggest, most racist gulag on the planet. You can't get much more reformist than teaching creative writing there. But at the same time many of my students said that the only thing that was keeping them sane was our classes. So in that moment any sort of belief I had in reform vs revolution question just fell apart, because once again: we need it all. That's one of the great things about everything being so fucked up, that no matter where you look there's great work to be done. If your call, if where your heart leads you is to work for battered woman's shelters, wonderful. Wonderful, wonderful. If it calls you to write for Arthur and to push a perspective that is anti-authoritarian or whatever: wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. If it pushes you to do a timber sales appeal: wonderful also. We need it all.

**But your book is about bringing down civilization—it's not about filling timber sales appeals.**

True, but I don't exclude that by any means. I talk about the military strategy of hammer and

anvil, a strategy used by Lee at the battle of Chancellorsville, where you keep a large part of your army back as an anvil, as a defensive force, and you send the rest of your army around to act as a hammer, an offensive force. Defensive work is incredibly important because if we all wait for the great glorious revolution, there's not going to be anything worth saving left anyway. But at the same time if all we do is this defensive work, this culture is gonna just keep grinding away at everything, and there'll be nothing left then either.

**"Those in power are not going to give up their stranglehold because we ask nicely. They won't stop exploiting the poor and deforesting because we circulate an online petition."**

It's like any revolution. The Black Panthers said this, the Zapatistas said this: 95% of any revolution is non-violent. A lot of it is education. A lot of it is this other stuff. And yes, of course the situation is desperately urgent, and yeah, dramatic stuff needs to be done. But I don't even see, for the most part, people doing the less dramatic stuff. *That's* what I find the most horrifying.

Having said this, that's not an attack on most people because I understand... I've got friends who have two kids and are working jobs that they and their partner are making seven bucks an hour and they're trying to raise two kids: "What, you actually want me to do something for the fairy shrimp in addition? Are you out of your mind?" I'm not judging my friends or other people for that but I also know that a tremendous amount of time is wasted watching television. I'm not saying anything against downtime either. I like to play online poker or whatever. I'm not saying that we need to spend every waking moment pushing and pushing. But we need to start doing the work. And we need to start doing it soon.

I kind of make fun of 'fair trade' but I gotta tell you, I think 'fair trade' is way better than 'slave trade.' But the problem I have is that's not sufficient. Timber sales appeals aren't sufficient. Working at battered women's shelters isn't sufficient. That's really the whole point: what we're doing isn't sufficient.

**You're just talking about re-prioritizing.**

Thank you! End of interview, you know? Every cell in my body wants for us to have a voluntary transformation to a sustainable way of living, where we would voluntarily have a softer landing, where we would recognize that we've overshot carrying capacity, that our way of living, which is based on the use of nonrenewable resources, won't last. But I don't think that's going to happen.

If your concern is for the well-being of the humans who will be alive during and immediately after the crash, then what you need to do is start preparing people for the crash. Because it's gonna come anyway. And if you don't believe it's gonna come, then we really honestly have nothing to say to each other. We can talk about what do you think about JD Drew for the Dodgers this year. ☼(43 ►



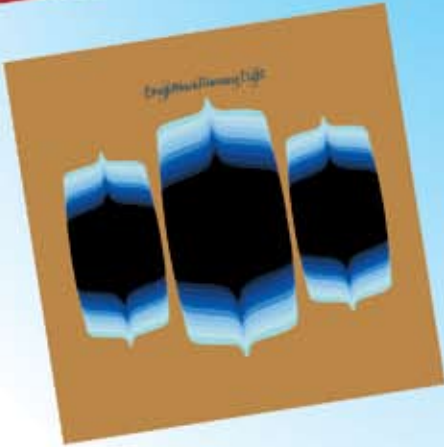
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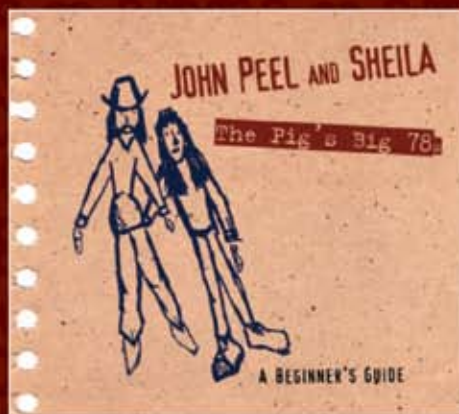
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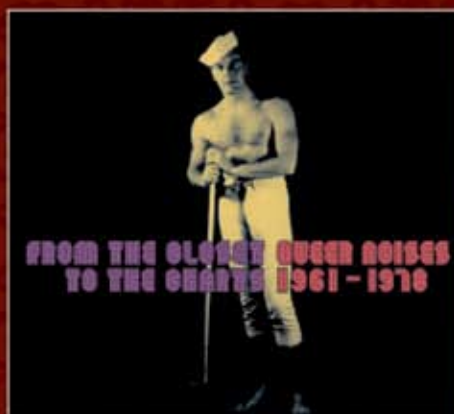
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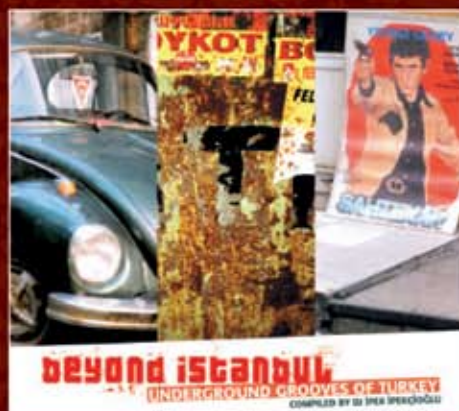
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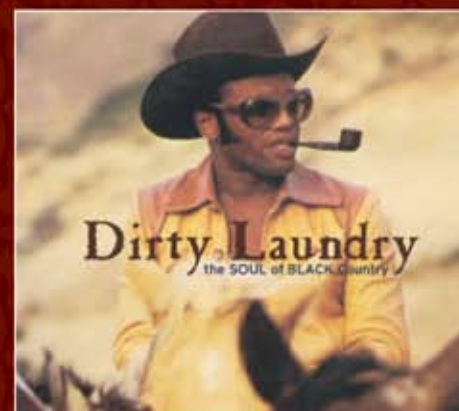
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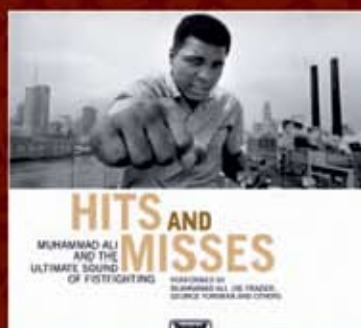
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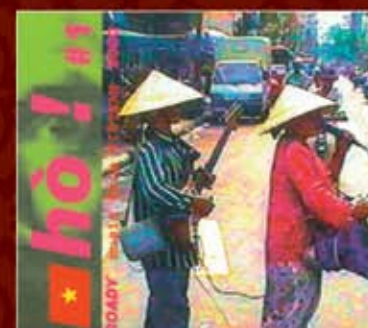
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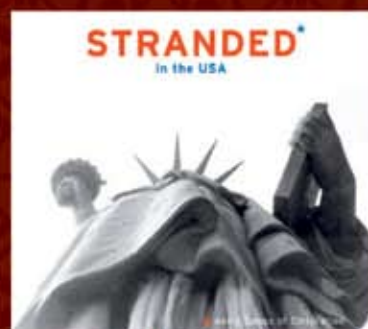
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# An Optimist on Two Fronts

The little-seen, oft-suppressed  
work of dissident filmmaker  
**Peter Watkins**  
challenged not just the political  
status quo but the form itself.

by  
**John Patterson**

In the late 1960s, a series of British filmmakers arrived in the United States who all offered new and vivid ways of looking at America with freshly peeled eyeballs. John Boorman turned Los Angeles into a Pop-Art, Technicolor Alphaville in 1967's *Point Blank*; Dick Lester (the expatriate American director who hadn't been home in 17 years) and his cameraman Nicolas Roeg fell to earth in acid-laced San Francisco, whose discontents they depicted (in 1968's *Petulia*) far more bleakly than did the habitués of Haight-Ashbury; "Swinging London" chronicler and beat-documentarian Peter Whitehead captured exploding America between the Tet Offensive and the early '68 Primaries in his poetic but hardly-seen *The Fall*; Peter Yates transformed the look of the urban crime thriller a year later in *Bullitt*; and John Schlesinger offered a sleazy, misanthropic look at America's urban flotsam in *Midnight Cowboy*.

None however, produced so searing and angry a denunciation of the New World as Peter Watkins did with 1971's faux documentary *Punishment Park*, with its invocations of political concentration camps on American soil, police death-squads executing activists and dissidents, and the media's inextricable complicity in both. Whereas most of the other newcomers' visions were welcomed, Watkins' was rejected out of hand. *Punishment Park* played for four days in Manhattan. PBS said outright that they would never show it. And so it vanished into a twilight world of occasional campus screenings—usually with Watkins in attendance—before vanishing utterly for 35 years. Apparently 1971 was the wrong time for an Englishman to diagnose, however sagely, the discontents of Vietnam-era America.

Time has either been very kind to his films or very cruel to us, by making the world so ugly and violent that *Punishment Park*'s recent re-release on DVD has occurred in the most propitious environment imaginable. Abu Grahیب and Guantanamo are fresh; the Patriot Act and the NSA wiretapping program hang menacingly over us all; war is back with a vengeance, and dissent against said war has metastasized, along with a profound disgust for the complicity of the corporate media in all the doings of Dubya. Where critics roundly abused the film—when they were not ignoring it—back in 1971, many are now roused to feel that Peter Watkins' vindication may be at hand. And with the gradual release by New Yorker Films of nearly all his major works over the 34

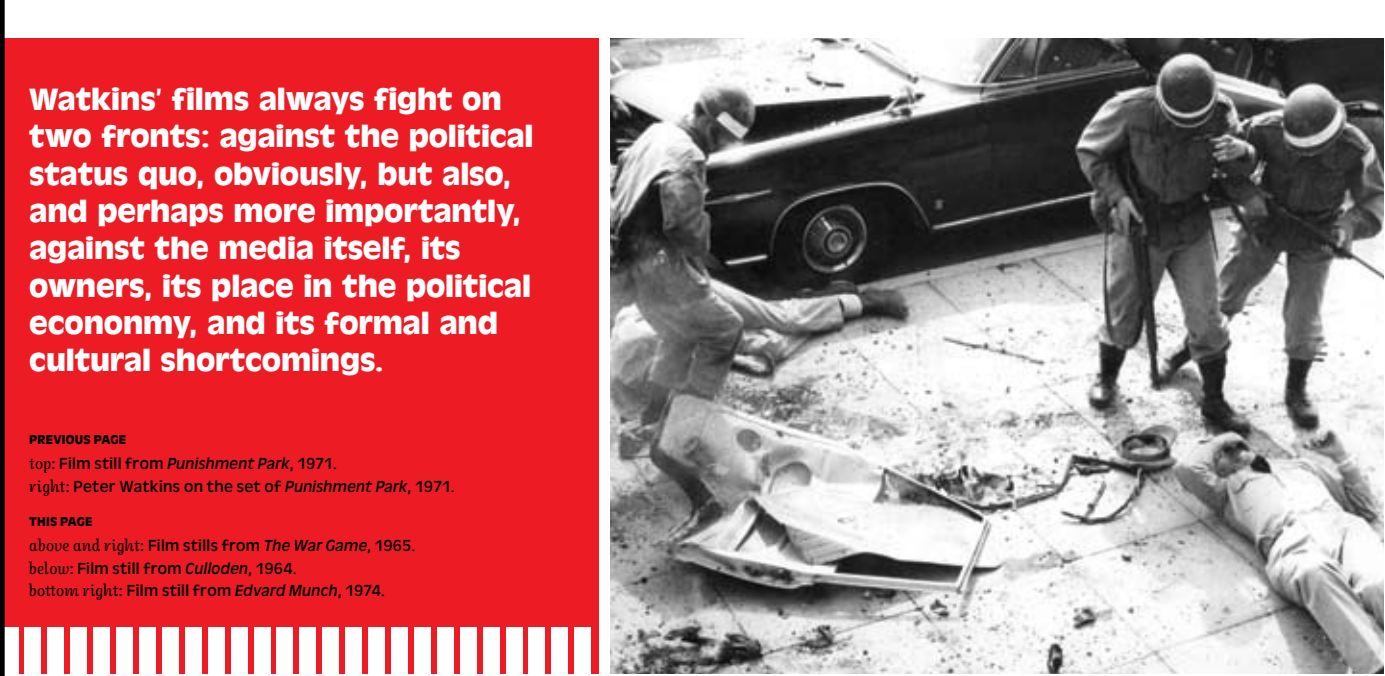


last year, Watkins can finally be reassessed—or assessed for the first time—on his own terms.

Watkins seems to have been born fully-formed as an artist. He studied at Oxford and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, becoming interested in radical politics and cinema. His second short film, a full-scale reenactment of the Budapest uprising of 1956, was shot entirely on the placid streets of his hometown of Canterbury. It won him a place at the BBC where his first commission, in 1964, was an adaptation of historian John Prebble’s revisionist account of the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

*Culloden*, which saw the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie’s invading army by King George II’s brother—known ever after as “Butcher Cumberland”—was the last battle fought on British soil, between two armies composed of aristocratic officers and feudally indentured English troops and Scottish clansmen. Watkins twisted the material by allowing his collective cast of performers to address the camera directly, to tell their own bitter stories and even, on occasion, to reach out and tell the crew to get the fuck out of the way. Watkins is narrator, providing context, facts and figures, and the future destinies of the participants, outlining class relations between Generals and cannon-fodder. In the brutal aftermath of the rout, the British regulars are seen hacking women and children down on country roads and beheading the dead. *Culloden* is a no-budget masterpiece of mocked-up war footage that puts Saving Private Ryan’s opening half-hour to shame (in addition to his other talents, Watkins is a world-class director of kinetic action footage). *Culloden* was also made in full awareness of what was beginning to unfold in Vietnam. It pulled no political punches, but its ecstatic critical reception was offset by angry complaints from right-wing MPs and military figures.

The fact that *Culloden*, with its heavy emphasis on political revisionism, was made for the documentary department of the famously “objective” BBC is indicative of certain tensions inherent in Watkins’ approach to drama. His next film, *The War Game*, was a fake documentary, albeit using realistic scenarios and public information about the likely effects of a nuclear attack on southern England, but was made within the Plays Department of the BBC, a cauldron of radical productivity that David Thompson, with little exaggeration, has dubbed “the Last Studio” (it also produced pioneering ’60s and ’70s work by Ken Loach, Dennis Potter, Steven Frears and Mike Leigh, among dozens of other filmmakers).



**Watkins’ films always fight on two fronts: against the political status quo, obviously, but also, and perhaps more importantly, against the media itself, its owners, its place in the political economy, and its formal and cultural shortcomings.**

**PREVIOUS PAGE**  
top: Film still from *Punishment Park*, 1971.  
right: Peter Watkins on the set of *Punishment Park*, 1971.  
**THIS PAGE**  
above and right: Film stills from *The War Game*, 1965.  
below: Film still from *Culloden*, 1964.  
bottom right: Film still from *Edvard Munch*, 1974.

At 48 minutes, *The War Game* was too hot for the BBC, and even more so for the politicians of the time. Using available statistics and government documents, Watkins showed that Britain, faced with the possibility of atomic warfare, had settled for the illusion of security in its aftermath. Watkins illustrated the effects of nuclear firestorms, mocked duck-and-cover safety drills (a child’s eyeballs melt down his face), and finished his highly unnerving polemic with the night-marish image of British bobbies interning political protesters and mercy-killing the victims of radiation sickness with a bullet. The corporation pulled it before broadcast, claiming it was too disturbing for the public. Although it won that year’s Best Documentary Oscar (the closest Watkins ever came to mainstream success) *The War Game* was not shown on British TV for another quarter-century, during which period it was established that it had in fact been suppressed for political reasons, not matters of taste—just as Watkins had always claimed. In addition Watkins had stood athwart the line separating fiction from documentary—it is the necessary place to be for an artist denouncing the latter as merely a variation on the former—and this only added to the discomfort of the powers that be.

A brief and unhappy flirtation with Paramount Pictures produced *Privilege* (1967), an intermittently successful satire on rock-n-roll (it features the GI rock band The Monks playing “Onward Christian Soldiers”) before Watkins left England for Scandinavia, his base for most of the next decade. There he put together *The Gladiators* (a/k/a *The Peace Game*, 1969), perhaps his weakest film, in which wars between nations are settled by small bands of warriors on an internationally broadcast TV show. *Privilege* never really found an audience, and *The Gladiators* was not widely shown, though both received some respectful reviews.

After failing to put together a project about the Little Big Horn in Los Angeles, Watkins found the backing for *Punishment Park*. Filmed in the Mojave Desert in 1970, under the wide, black shadow cast by Kent State, the Chicago Seven Conspiracy Trial, the illegal bombing of Cambodia, and the insidious process by which the Nixon White House sought to arrogate ever more power unto itself, the movie showcases as well as any of Watkins’ films the essential method which has served him so well over his career.

Unfolding in a half-speculative, half-satirical timeframe that one might call “the recent future,” *Punishment*

*Park* takes elements from the contemporary political ether, stretches them to their plausible limits and then builds a searing, sun-scorched drama within that context. It is 1973. *The Clampdown* on political dissent has already occurred, under the draconian terms of the anti-communist 1950 McCarran Security Act. Interned dissidents are transported to the Bare Mountain National Punishment Park. When guilt is established, defendants have a choice: a lengthy prison term or Punishment Park. The latter requires a group of prisoners to cross 50 miles of desert without food or water. Survivors can go free; more likely they will die of dehydration or be shot by organized bands of police, highway patrolmen and National Guardsmen.

Watkins cuts between the grueling desert ordeal—think: Survivor with real guns and bloodshed—of the condemned prisoners, and the show-trial of the next batch, which is consciously modeled on the proceedings against the Chicago Seven. As always, the cast is collective, not focused on individuals. All the actors are amateurs, cast for the proximity of their political views to those of their characters: words and opinions are their own. Antiwar activists, feminists and union organizers play the prisoners. Right-wingers, cops, and political “moderates” play the judging panel and the murderous enforcers of the last shreds of the law.

With this 360-degree environment in place and the figures within it all set to run and play and suffer and die, Watkins adds his distinctive pseudo-documentary overlay. All the major media companies are here to film all proceedings in *Punishment Park*. Watkins, as in all his films, acts as narrator and interviewer, and is always behind the (usually handheld) camera, eliciting raw anger from the prisoners and blithe and arrogant fuck-you-so-whats from their uniformed oppressors (the camera was operated by Joan Churchill, who has since worked extensively with Watkins’ fellow BBC alumni Nick Broomfield. Cinematographer Haskell Wexler says he lit the tent scenes for *Churchill*.) As the ordeal in the sun becomes ever more blood-soaked and viciously punitive, Watkins’ “objectivity” steadily dissolves and he is finally reduced to screaming, “Stop it, you fucking bastards!” as, within sight of the prisoners’ objective—an American flag—troops methodically beat and massacre the last few remaining prisoners.

No one makes it. (This is A Peter Watkins movie.)

Watkins’ films always fight on two fronts: against the political status quo, obviously, but also, and per-

haps more importantly, against the media itself, its owners, its place in the political economy, and its formal and cultural shortcomings. In his early work, he merely made the process of filmmaking evident to the viewer, but after his experience with *The War Game*, the craven nature of conventional media coverage and broadcast institutions became one of his overarching themes. He has since worked to overthrow conventional ideas about running times—his antinuclear epic *The Journey* (1987) lasted 14 hours—and notions of who is qualified to make movies—his Strindberg biopic *The Freethinker* was written, performed, photographed and edited by a Swedish high school class Watkins was teaching in 1994. Subsequent experiences have only deepened his antipathy toward the institutional media, which has sometimes hobbled his career in TV. After all, if one of the cornerstones of your aesthetic and political method is an abiding distrust of, and contempt for, the very mechanisms by which your work will be made available for public examination, you may soon find that the phone stops ringing. It’s a testament to Watkins’ stubbornness and determination that he ever made another film again.

Watkins addressed the issue in his most personal and lyrical film, *Edvard Munch*, a polemical biography of the pioneering Norwegian Expressionist, made for Oslo television in 1973 and released to international acclaim in 1975 (naturally, its backers hated the film and did whatever they could to stymie its success). Here was an artist identifying totally with his subject: like Watkins, Munch refused to countenance any limit or compromise to his bleak vision, no matter how much insult and false recrimination he endured from the artistic establishment of his time. This intense sympathy between biographer and subject may also explain why *Edvard Munch* is among the greatest portraits ever created of an artist’s life and work.


In the lean years between such projects, Watkins has established a parallel persona as a media theorist at his website (<http://www.mnsi.net/~pwatkins/>), decrying the prevailing hierarchical media approach he has dubbed the Monoform. He condemns the topdown imposition of political conclusions, the absence of any entry-point for the passive, excluded spectator, and the reliance on optimistic, hero-centric narrative forms, as well as the institutional corruption and dishonesty of most state-backed or corporate media outlets. It is a coherent, compelling and highly persuasive diagnosis, but one feels it would require

a revolution to bring it all down.

Which brings us to *La Commune* (Paris 1871) which alongside *Edvard Munch* is probably Watkins’ masterpiece. Six hours long, filmed entirely in swooping Steadicam takes lasting up to 15 minutes, it attempts nothing less than a recreation of the revolutionary Commune that ruled Paris in the aftermath of France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. This story is still so incendiary that most French schools simply do not address it in history lessons, and Watkins is anxious to show how those in poverty and deprivation were able, with no outside help, to articulate and put into practice many of the revolutionary ideals—feminism, equal pay, popular democracy, free state (i.e., non-religious) education for all, collectivism, etc.—that would sustain the political Left throughout the century to come.

The result is perhaps the purest embodiment of Brecht’s theories of Epic Theater ever committed to film (Brecht himself once wrote a play called *Les Jours de la Commune* for his Berliner Ensemble). Deliberately adding the creative anachronism of two TV news teams—one right-wing (and disconcertingly like Fox-News) and another that’s politically engaged with the communards—Watkins puts the innards of the filmmaking and newsgathering machinery on full display, and while we are never allowed to forget that we’re watching a manufactured, albeit committed polemic, he also enables us to feel great anguish when these flawed, but optimistic utopian idealists are finally massacred, in their tens of thousands, by Monarchist troops in a Parisian park—another *Punishment Park*.

Before this happens however, Watkins has also made us feel—through endless discussion, argument, violence and peacability—the sense that it is possible and desirable to tear the old world down and rebuild it anew, according to fresh and equitable precepts that encompass the dignity and worth of every man and woman. Such radical ideals have been eroded and scorned into meaninglessness of late, and Watkins’ great achievement is to make them intoxicating once again. And, to answer Watkins’ critics, that is not what pessimists do. It is what optimists strive for.

Somewhere deep in his despair, Peter Watkins, a man who truly has no home but the struggle, is an indefatigable optimist. His work awaits you. Seize it with both hands, because it will change you, and it will make you want to change everything else. 



# PLAYING DEAD

HOW/+++  
PROTEST/  
IS/++++  
ENTERING/  
THE/++++  
(VIDEO)/++++  
GAME/++  
OF/++++  
WAR/+++

by  
**Ed Halter**  
illustration by  
**Geoff McFetridge**

Like millions of others around the world, Joseph DeLappe spends multiple hours each week logged into online multiplayer games. His current game of choice is *America's Army*, the squad-based tactical shooter produced and promoted by the real US Army as a tool for PR and recruitment efforts. *America's Army* has been available for free download from *AmericasArmy.com* since July 4, 2002, and in its three-plus years of existence has developed a devoted global following; if nothing else, it has successfully enhanced the Army's brand by associating it with something engaging, cutting-edge and youth-friendly. Millions of users who might not otherwise have a personal connection to the American military have found one through playing the game: they've gone on missions based on realistic contemporary scenarios, learned to fight together using official Army protocol and rules of engagement, and even had the chance to play alongside real US soldiers, who signal their participation via exclusive insignia worn by their online characters. While deadly and chaotic wars in Iraq and Afghanistan fill the headlines and TV screens, with reports as intimately gruesome as HBO's *Baghdad ER*, *America's Army* has provided a counter-image of the military that is as idealized as a textbook, as thrilling as a Hollywood movie, and as addictive as any commercial video game around. It is a paradoxical media object, mirroring its eponymous nation's own divided consciousness: a game that celebrates realism through a carefully constructed fantasy that omits more than it reveals. In *America's Army*, characters don't end up with brain damage, missing limbs or post-traumatic stress disorder, or have to deal with an administration that sent them to a war that most back home don't support, and then slashed their veteran's benefits to boot—because none of that would be any fun at all, compared to the high-adrenaline, deep-strategy game-time of make-believe battle.

DeLappe, however, chooses to play the game rather differently than most. His virtual warfighter—whom he has named “dead-in-iraq”—logs onto *America's Army* and simply stands there and does nothing. DeLappe nevertheless takes part in the game in other ways. Drawing from publicly available rosters of US casualties in Iraq, DeLappe types out the names of killed servicemembers into the game's text message chat window, entering one name per line. For example, during one of DeLappe's missions of virtual conscientious objection, some fellow *America's Army* players saw this appear in their text message scroll as they organized for battle:

[US Army] dead-in-iraq  
messed: JONATHAN LEE  
GIFFOR, 20, MARINES, MAR  
23, 2003  
[US Army] dead-in-iraq  
messed: JOSE ANGEL  
GARIBAY, 21, MARINES, MAR  
23, 2003  
[US Army] dead-in-iraq  
messed: DAVID KEITH  
FRIBLEY, 26, MARINES, MAR  
23, 2003

If his dead-in-iraq character gets killed in battle or is voted off the server by fellow gamers (a procedure typically employed with players who aren't taking the game seriously and thereby inhibiting others), DeLappe logs back on at another time and continues where he left off. He started this text recitation in March 2006, and by the middle of May had typed out the names of over 350 war casualties. He's inputting the names chronologically, from the first casualty onward, and intends to type out a complete naming of the military dead. DeLappe says he will continue this online memorial until there are no more names to memorialize—in other words, until the war stops producing American corpses in uniform (and at the time of writing this article, that means he has more than 2100 names to go). So DeLappe has found his own way to play *America's Army*, creating an experience that owes less to *Quake* than it does to the Quakers.

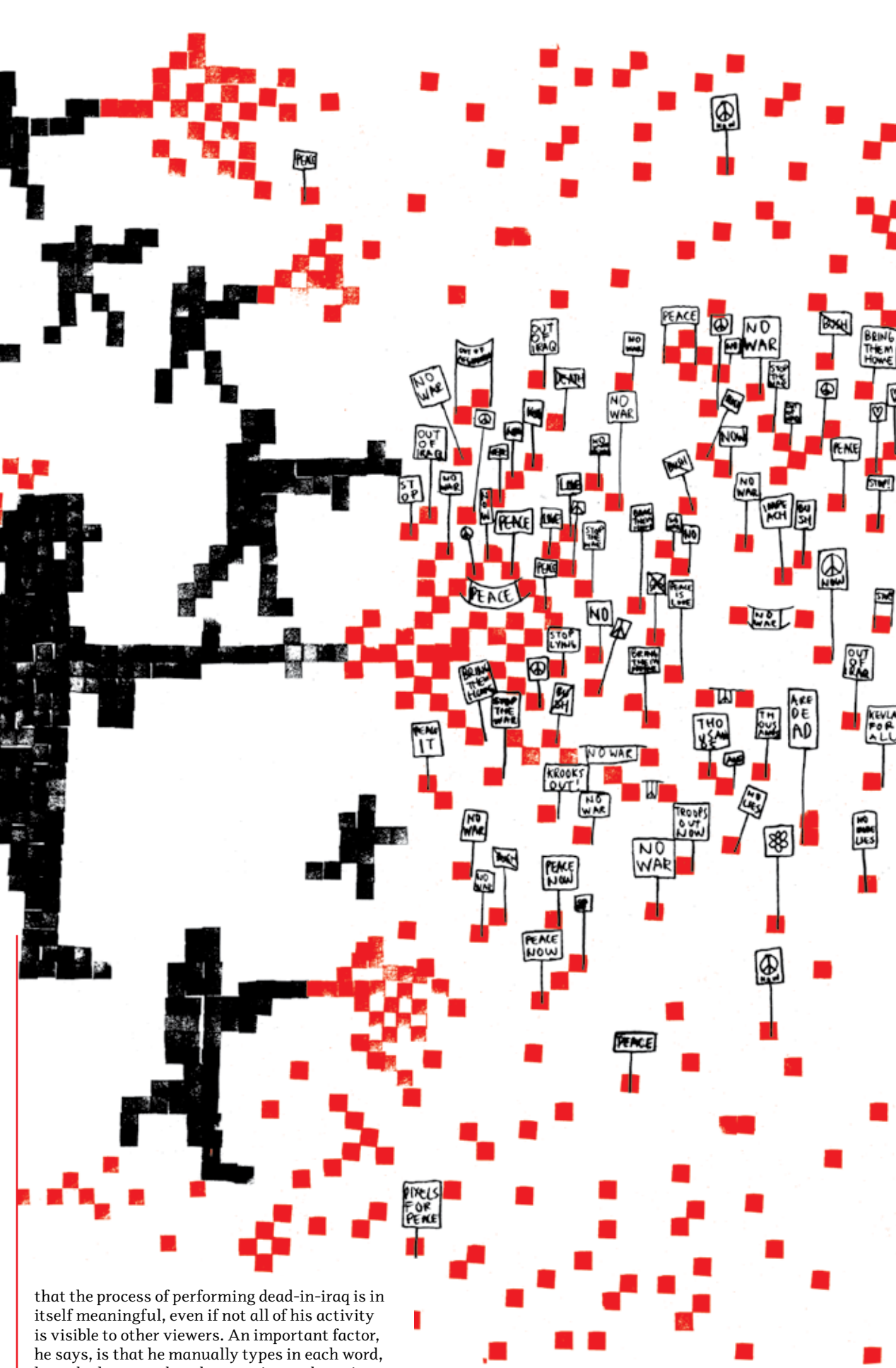
A media artist and professor at the University of Nevada Reno (a town better known for a different kind of gaming), DeLappe displays a small archive of screenshots from his dead-in-iraq project on his website, <http://www.delappe.net>. The now-frozen responses from virtual army men range from confusion to anger. “I think they are the dates of deaths of soldiers,” types one player under the name of hk-burritoman#1. “Are those real people?” asks BgRobSmith. “U arent encouraging me to join the service,” messages one Mojo216. Gen.MstrChief (a *Halo* fan, one assumes, slumming it PCside) responds more aggressively, texting “dead in iraq shut the \*\*\*\* up!” after each casualty's name. DeLappe's dead-in-iraq never responds to any of these comments or outbursts; he just keeps listing names until he's somehow forced to leave.

The decision to boot players is usually done by fellow gamers; so far, DeLappe has not dealt with any higher administrative authority. According to DeLappe, the game's legally binding end-user license agreement addresses copyright infringement and hacks, but not in-game actions. Within the game, the stated Code of Conduct forbids such things as player harassment, derogatory

language, “spamming chat” and failure to follow the orders of squad leaders; at presstime, no administrative authority had yet tried to ban DeLappe by citing any of these infringements. When gaming news-and-reviews site GameSpy asked US Army reps for comment on DeLappe's project, Public Affairs Specialist Paul Boyce gave a somewhat evasive reply: “America's Army” open to virtual participation in an authentic U.S. Army experience to players throughout the United States,” he told the reporter. “The Army does not limit participation unless there is negative impact on other players' experiences. As such, unless an individual uses foul or insensitive language, or is otherwise ruining gameplay for others, the management of America's Army takes no action.”

He sees this ongoing, obsessive online roll-call as digital performance art, a protest, and a memorial, not unlike the live readings of the names of the dead that have become standard antiwar ritual. “It is like street theater,” he told me recently, “or having a soap box in the public square.” It is also something of a social experiment. “No matter how radical or innovative these games might be,” he says, “they're very similar, they're very controlled.” Since most memorials happen well after the war is over, a curious part of the project is to find out what it means to do a memorial as the war is still going on.

Like many contemporary artists influenced by the history of conceptual art, DeLappe believes





A BRIEF HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES AND THE PENTAGON

America's Army isn't the first convergence of video games and the US military—nor is it likely the last.

The very earliest computer games emerged as side-effects of Cold War defense funding; before the '70s, the Pentagon was the single largest investor in the development of American computer technology. MIT hackers brewed the sci-fi shooter *Spacewar!* on computers paid for by the Pentagon in the mid-Sixties. Around the same time, inventor Ralph Baer proposed the first prototypes for *Pong* while working for a military defense contractor.

During the age of arcade gaming and the first home console systems, representatives of the US Army approached Atari to see if they'd make a training system for the Bradley Armored Infantry Vehicle out of their 3D vector-graphics classic *Battlezone* in 1980. Only a few prototypes were built, however. During the height of *Pac-Man* fever, military recruiters sent representatives to arcades, hoping to sign up the next generation of joystick jockeys. By that time, America's high-tech military used a number of flight and tank simulators for training whose graphics outclassed anything available to mere Nintendos.

PC gaming came into its own just as the Gulf War brought US troops to Iraq for the first time. The first-person shooter genre emerged with early PC titles *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom*. In the mid '90s, clever Marines modified *Doom* into a boots-on-the-ground training device for four-man fire teams. Simply dubbed *Marine Doom* the mod removed non-regulation weaponry (so long, chainsaw) and replaced alien monsters with generic enemy soldiers. The game saw only limited use, but inspired others who saw new ways to teach warfare to a generation raised on computers and gaming.

In 1996, the National Research Council hosted a conference called *Modeling and Simulation: Linking Entertainment and Defense*, organized by Michael Zyda of the Naval Postgraduate School. The goal was to explore the potential for collaboration between the defense sector and the entertainment industry: reps from Pixar, Disney, Paramount and George Lucas' Industrial Light & Magic rubbed shoulders with officers from the Army, Navy, Air Force, National Guard and DARPA.

Afterwards, Zyda went on to oversee the genesis of *America's Army* project, while in 1999 the Army poured \$45 million into USC to create the Institute for Creative Technologies, a military-entertainment think-tank that produced, among other projects, *Full Spectrum Warrior*, the first console game created as both a internal training system and a commercial product (initially for Xbox in 2004).

Other branches worked with commercial gaming companies as well. The Marines helped produce Destineer's commercial title *Close Combat: First to Fight*, which also saw use as a trainer, while the Navy had a hand in the popular *SOCOM: Navy Seals* franchise. Even indepenetly produced military titles like *Conflict: Desert Storm* or *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* tout retired generals as design consultants. Currently, the Army is looking into converting *America's Army* into a training device, and using *Full Spectrum Warrior* to treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

—Ed Halter

something I eagerly anticipate.” And the actions of other players unwittingly add other layers of meaning to the performance: by booting him out of their game, they’re metaphorically denying death’s reality, policing their digital fantasyland Valhalla of eternal warriors from any reminder of real-world mortality.

Using computers to make art is not new for DeLappe. One of his group of works from the late-90s took the form of customized Apple mice augmented with nipples, vaginas or the Unabomber manifesto: a Cronenbergian comment on how enmeshed these bits of plastic and circuitry become with our bodies and minds. He also created a series of abstract motion-tracked designs by attaching a pen or brush to his mouse and then playing *Quake* or *Chessmaster 2000* with his mouse-marker atop a canvas; here again, the immaterial and material meet, the former leaving its literal traces on the latter.

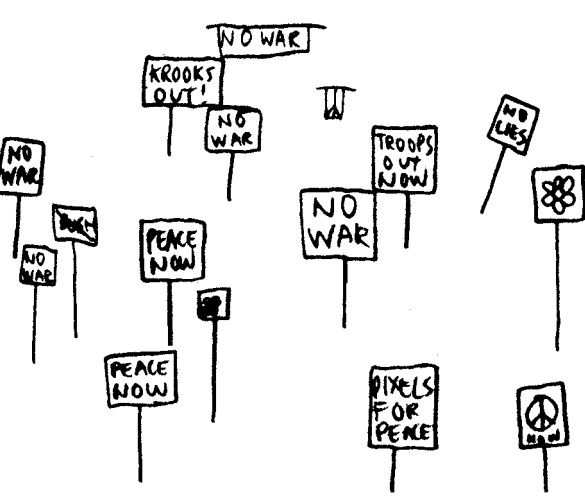
And he has staged “interventions” inside synthetic game worlds before. In 2003, he organized a group to re-enact an episode of *Friends* inside of *Quake* for a performance called “Quake/ Friends,” which attracted attention from both an art critic for the New York Times and a lawyer for Warner Brothers. Another piece involved DeLappe “reciting” the full text of the poem “Howl” inside the futuristic shooter *Elite Force Voyager Online*, typing it out by hand, line by line (his character’s name in this case was simply “Allen Ginsberg.”). Later versions of this idea took an overtly political tack. For “War Poets/ Medal of Honor,” DeLappe typed verses by World War 1 poet Sigfried Sassoon into the instant message window of the World War II game *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. In a three-part series called “The Great Debate,” DeLappe re-enacted the 2004 presidential debates between Kerry and Bush inside of *Battlefield Vietnam*, *Star Wars Jedi Knight Outcast* and *The Sims Online*. This last project involved a bit of improvisation as well: when other players began asking questions to the virtual doppelgangers of Kerry and Bush, DeLappe ad-libbed responses in character.

Dead-in-iraq is not the first time an artist has imported anti-war protest into a military game space. “Velvet Strike,” a project by artists Brody Condon, Joan Leandre and Anne-Marie Schleiner, brought a more absurd form of political action inside the world of terrorist vs. anti-terrorist game *Counter-Strike* (a wildly popular free mod for *Half-Life* whose success, incidentally, appears to have been an inspiration for *America's Army*). In 2002, Schleiner began to ponder the growing trend towards war-themed “realism” in games, exemplified by *Counter-Strike* as well as the various whack-Osama online mini-games that proliferated after 9-11. In response, the Velvet Strike team offered up a variety of ways to stage actions inside *Counter-Strike*, including downloadable “sprays” that enabled players’ characters to shoot posters onto walls, and “recipes” for acting out pacifist scenarios during games. Schleiner even developed a “game within a game”—a program that allows players to shoot a hopscotch diagram on the battleground floor, adding a subversive girlie touch to the ammo-laden hypermasculine realm. The proposed recipes skew towards the prankish—one suggested that during a battle, you should “tell everyone you are martyrs for peace, then jump off the tallest structure in the level, killing yourselves”—and the original sprays have a geek-punk wit, including a childish drawing of a pink teddy bear with the slogan “Shoot Love Bubbles” and another with the

homoerotic image of a terrorist and counter-terrorist embraced in a kiss.

Unsurprisingly, dead-in-iraq and Velvet Strike drew the ire of many gamers who accused the artists of ruining their pastime and injecting unnecessary political statements into entertainment. On her website (<http://www.opensorcery.com/velvetstrike>), Schleiner writes that she received a “flood...of sometimes hilarious hate mail” in response to Velvet Strike, and posted some of the best of these “flaming jewels” for her readers. DeLappe likewise reports that “other gamers almost always get furious if you do this sort of thing,” and typically respond by voting him off the server.

Though DeLappe’s in-game actions are only visible to about a dozen players at any given time, the dead-in-iraq concept itself has taken on a life of its own outside of *America's Army*. Once news of dead-in-iraq hit the blogosphere, DeLappe's project became an object of intense debate on forums like Gamepolitics.com and Terra Nova, a blog about virtual worlds.



Many respondents were supportive of his project: after all, a number of them pointed out, since this game is funded by American tax dollars, can't we do what we want inside of it? And if DeLappe's activity is disruptive, isn't that was protest is all about? “On some level it is obnoxious to break into the game with some very real-world content,” DeLappe says, “but that’s what it’s about at some level.” Many have complained, he says, that “‘we come here to escape, so how dare you bring this stuff into here.’ I understand this, but at the same time, I find escaping from what is going on to be problematic.”

Others criticized the effectiveness of protesting inside a game that would provide audiences of merely a handful at a time: wouldn't his energy be better spent protesting outside of, say, a real recruitment office, instead *America's Army*? (On Gamepolitics, another commentator countered this argument, pointing out that, even though none of them actually saw dead-in-iraq as it happened, “here we are talking about it...The way to effectively protest is to capture peoples’ attention. It’s like marketing, the target changes, the idea has to be fresh and new.”)

However, questions about whether dead-in-iraq or Velvet Strike will attract new converts to the cause or merely preach to the choir are the least interesting ones raised by these projects; they’re probably the most typical critiques of any kind of protest, virtual or otherwise, and only extend the win-or-lose logic of games onto another level. A more significant issue is raised by the very possibility of such activity inside these virtual spaces in the first place. ☼(43)►

arthur

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An orchestra of feedback  
and humidity, courtesy of  
New Orleans duo **Belong**

by  
**Gabe Soria**  
illustration by  
**Arik Moonhawk Roper**

# HEAVY AIR

There's a 'round-the-clock environmental buzz everywhere in New Orleans if you've got the ears to hear it. It's a deep, almost sub-sonic, earth-drone that's especially evident during the wicked days of summer. It's in the awesome silence of the baking, deserted streets at noontime; it's in the deafening biological volume of the wild, tropical greenery and of bugs reproducing insanely; it's in the groaning of the cracked sidewalks, ancient houses and crumbling cemeteries; it's in the lysergic-like intoxication produced by the common cocktail of casual drinking crossed with 100 percent humidity and three-digit thermometer readings.

*October Language*, the stunning debut album from New Orleans drone guitar-duo Belong, is a de facto impressionistic field recording of the ineffable and beautiful noise that permeates the city. Miles away from the jazz, funk and bounce hip-hop that defines New Orleans music to the world at large, *October Language* still manages to be as genius an expression of the soul of the city as Professor Longhair's "Tipitina," Juvenile's "Back That Azz Up," Dr. John's "Right Place, Wrong Time" or Irma Thomas's "Ruler of My Heart." It's the sound of sweat, hallucination and revelation, and every cat who's made it through a couple of New Orleans summers can dig that.

Belong is comprised of New Orleans natives Turk Dietrich, 28, and Mike Jones, 27. Dietrich—lanky and gregarious, possessor of the New Orleans accent that sounds strangely Southern and Brooklyn-esque at the same time—is the talker of the two. Both came back to New Orleans a few weeks after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, and both plan on staying for the foreseeable future. Both are the type of guys who you want to knock back beers with all night with in a smelly bar, fellas you'd want to have on your side in a fight. Having heard snatches of their brilliant debut scant days before a second trip to his old habitat of New Orleans inside a month [the last being a Mardi Gras visit detailed last issue], your correspondent made a few phone calls and tracked Belong down to a bustling coffee-house on Magazine Street for a quick talk. Decompressing from a recent U.S. tour with Ariel Pink and preparing to embark on a European tour, the band was eager to jaw about video games, the peculiar habit of some New Orleans residents of beginning evenings out at midnight, and plans to attend work parties to help Ms. Antoinette K-Doe repair the fire damaged Mother-in-Law Lounge. We also managed to talk about music a bit...

Do you hear a connection between the feel of New Orleans and the music you make?

**TURK:** If we were brought up elsewhere, our music would sound very different, I suppose. It doesn't have much to do with My Bloody Valentine and Fennesz like some people say; it has everything to do with our surroundings and environment.

**MIKE:** New Orleans feels... worn. There's a decay in the city. Things that aren't obviously beautiful. Dissonance. [Laughter] And distortion and buzz and layering sounds. Part of the city's visual appeal and character lies in it's aged and worn qualities, from the degradation and decay that has occurred over time. Like many we see the beauty in this and our music incorporates this seeming contradiction.

I think that "fuzz" as an aesthetic concept is just coming back.

**TURK:** It's probably a subconscious reaction to the clean, perfected recordings of nowadays. Everything's so rigid and manicured in ProTools to sound lifeless. I think a lot of people are making shit dirty again. Bringing some color to the table, ☘ (42)





Belong: Turk Dietrich (L) and Mike Jones.

“In New Orleans you can mind your business. You’re not doing music to impress anybody, because no one cares.”

some texture you know?

**Why do you think it’s so appealing?**

**TURNK:** I think a lot of people’s ears like stuff really loud. The depth, maybe, that fuzz brings? You can layer a bunch of noise, something that’s aliasing in a track, it can bury other elements of the track and it kinda makes you pay attention, to work harder as a listener to find the hook in the track. I think that’s one reason why people love bands that are totally fuzzed out and are not... it’s a way to make things less obvious, I think.

**You start hearing weirder things in there.**

**TURNK:** Absolutely. It reminds me of the effect I get from some Glenn Branca stuff—it’s just like really repetitive for awhile, he’s banging on the same chord and then you start to hear different things that maybe weren’t intended to be there.

**MIKE:** There are alternate tunings and the strings are banging against each other...

**October Language was recorded before Katrina. Did you feel any different about the record after the storm? Were you thinking that it was, like, some weird relic of some other time or you were you like, “We’re still going to put this record out. It doesn’t matter.”**

**TURNK:** I can see how maybe people can make that connection, but I don’t know if it has a deeper meaning than it did before it was done. The record still definitely resonates with me, but having been on tour, I’ve heard the record so much that I can’t really be objective about it right now. I’m sure four or five

months from now it might have a more profound effect on me when I can distance myself more.

**Why would you stay there when another hurricane season is upon you? What keeps you in New Orleans?**

**MIKE:** My family has never lived anywhere else. Our roots in the area go way back. My family’s lived here quite a while, some parts for over a 120 years. As far as the threat of another hurricane, it is not enough to make us move. Living in New Orleans, you deal with the possibility of a hurricane hitting every year.

**TURNK:** Besides the beautiful architecture, culture, and food, each of which you could go on about endlessly, the people are another reason to stay.

**What keeps you here, musically?**

**TURNK:** Having lived in Chicago, you can’t get away from the music scene there. Someone’s talking about their music all the time. In New Orleans, you can mind your business. It’s off the charts. There’s a motivation to the isolation, but you’re not doing it to impress anybody. No one cares.

**MIKE:** There’s no social ladder to climb. There’s no reason to be cool or put on airs. You don’t have to talk to people about what you do. They don’t care. I don’t know if it’s an advantage, but I like it. A lot of people here are content with just talking about forming a band at a bar. They’d rather drink and hang out.

**TURNK:** I think that over time New Orleans bands haven’t gotten recognized, so when bands form now they have low expectations. They have their period when they learn their songs and feel like they’re good, they do a few shows and then they don’t see a light at the end of the tunnel so the bands just sort of fizzle away. As opposed to, say, New York. You could play to a hundred, hundred and fifty kids every night. You’re constantly getting this feedback on your music. Whereas in New Orleans...

**After a while, here you’re going be seeing the same people.**

**TURNK:** Yeah, the same 20 people.

**MIKE:** If they even come.

**TURNK:** Hopefully, people will see what we did. They’ll see that you can do shit in your house, you can record it, you can get a good quality album together and you can push it out there having never played a live show and you can get signed. It’s different from 20 years ago. From the day we decided to get together [in August 2002] we’ve gotten together twice a week in my house, usually around ten o’clock at night and we work until four, five, five

thirty in the morning. We’re in the studio. We’re trying to produce and finish tracks. We’re not even thinking about a live show. It’s a totally different mind set than what bands would normally do. We have a nice collection of pre-amps, a ton of effects and whatnot. It’s not a four-track. We have nice set-up for a bedroom studio. It’s not Abbey Road, but it gets the job done.

**Do you guys make any of your own pedals?**

**TURNK:** I wish I that engineering savvy, but I don’t. [Laughter] So what are you guys going to do next? Is there anybody you’d love to work with in the future? Any filmmaker you’d like to work with?

**MIKE:** I’ve never given thought to that kind of stuff. Here in New Orleans you feel kinda isolated from everywhere else, so that even happening seems like a long shot. But I would do a David Gordon Green movie.

**TURNK:** I would not turn down Wong-Kar Wai. There’s no way. That’s off the top of my dome. If he called us up and said, “I want y’all to do two pieces for the film,” we’d be like, “Yeah! For free?”

You must have stacks of tracks ready for a second album.

**TURNK:** Yeah, we have a lot a stuff that’ll probably never get used. A lot of hard drive space filled with stuff that I don’t want to go back and listen to. [Laughter] The next thing we’re going to do, we’re going to do an EP for Very Friendly, which is a UK record label. The way I’m looking at it, it’ll maybe be a warm-up-slash-foreshadowing of the second album.

**Will the second album sound a lot like the first?**

**MIKE:** I don’t think we have to make a conscious decision. I mean, especially since we recorded it in 2004.

**TURNK:** It’s OLD now. When we get into the studio, we have more gear to play with now...

**MIKE:** New interests.

**TURNK:** There will definitely be new things in the mix that you may not think we would do.

**MIKE:** Get Juvenile on it.

**TURNK:** If we could get Juvey on it, we’d get him in a slick minute. ③

—(Derrick Jensen continued from page 30)---▶

What the hell’s wrong with the Angels? But if you do believe that a) there’s going to be a crash and b) it’s going to be messy and c) the current economic system is dismantling the ecological infrastructure of the planet, which means the longer it takes, the worse things are going to be, what that means is what you need to do is to start finding out what local plants can be used for antibiotics. What are local water purification systems you’ll be able to use. How are you going to build shelters. How will you pull up parking lots to make gardens. Learning self-defense and forming committees to deal with the additional violence that might (or might not) break out. Getting to know your neighbors, both human and nonhuman. How’s that for a start?

In the end, I think the primary measure by which we will be judged by those who come after will be the health of the landbase. Everything else builds from there. The people who come after aren’t going to give a shit as to whether we voted Democrat, Republican, Green, anarchist, or none of the above. They’re not going to give a shit about whether we signed or didn’t sign online petitions. They’re not going to give a shit about how hard we tried. It’s no good to live in a groovy eco-socialist utopia with free love if the planet is toxified. Those who come after are going to care about whether they can breathe the air, whether they can drink the water, whether the land can support them. Everything else comes from that. This seems so obvious I’m embarrassed to have to say it, but this culture is so insane it needs to be said. And it needs to be lived. ②

—(Playing Dead continued from page 30)---▶

Video games have evolved to such a point that they are offering possibilities for activities that go beyond what we typically conceive of as traditionally rule-bound games: think of it as the exploratory logic of *World of Warcraft* or *Grand Theft Auto* projected back into a space supposedly reserved for mere combat simulation.

And large-scale multiplayer games have themselves seen their share of in-game protests. In January 2005, *World of Warcraft* players staged a massive march of gnomes in order to call for changes in the abilities of one of the available character classes; because all the protesters logged onto the same server, their collective presence caused it to crash. After *World of Warcraft*’s parent company banned a gay-friendly guild from forming inside the game, certain players sent characters to protest at in-game weddings, claiming the company was unfairly allowing for displays of heterosexuality but no other orientations. Edward Castronova, an economist who studies how culture and money work within such virtual worlds, has noted on Terra Nova that similar protests have occurred inside games like *Ultima Online*, *Second Life* and *Star Wars Galaxies*. With tens of millions of users, Castronova asks, “will these cultures begin to think of themselves in terms of statehood?”

Perhaps in the near future, we may have to question the authority of virtual governments as well as our real ones, as many do when discussing the implications of dead-in-iraq. But the most powerful aspect of DeLappe’s project is that it does not offer any easy pro- or anti-war message. He has simply devoted himself to reiterating a hard reality—these people died in Iraq—and does so inside of a game explicitly created to aid Army recruitment efforts. In a way, isn’t he ultimately assisting the Army’s cause by improving the quality of new recruits? After all, let’s be realistic: anyone who is squeamish about dying in Iraq at this point should definitely not sign up. ②

# BASTET

## Arthur Magazine’s Media Imprint



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So Much Fire to Roast Human Flesh

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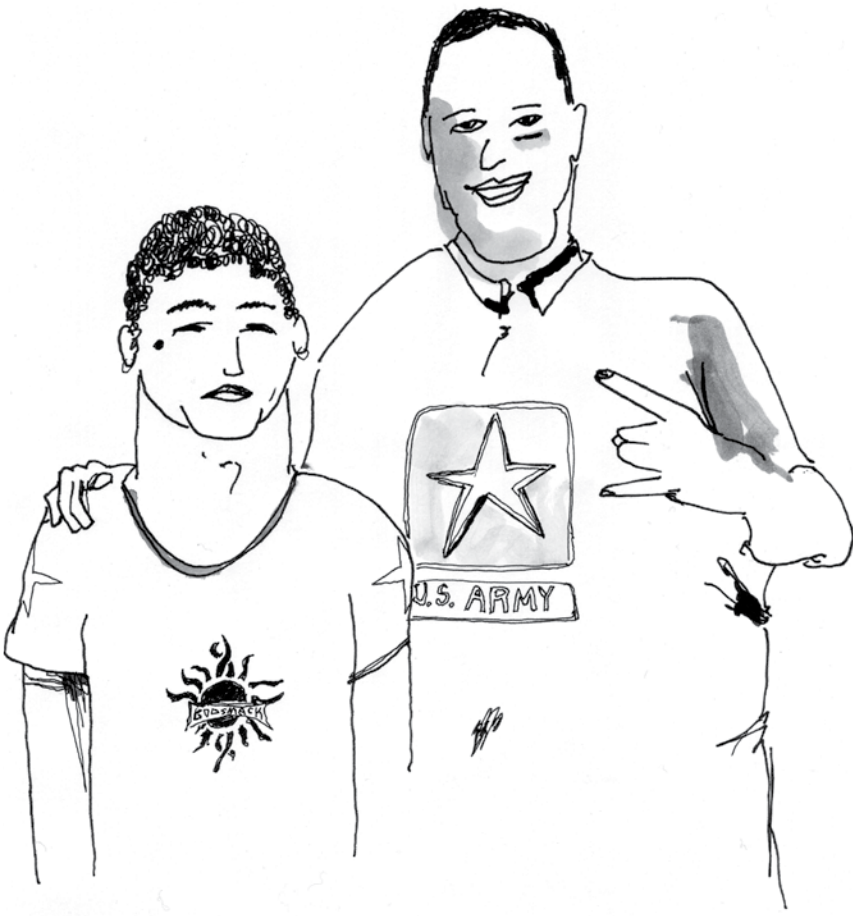
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# ARE YOU THERE GODSMACK?



Arthur asked singer **Sully Erna** to explain his pro-war statements and his No. 1-selling pop-rock band's involvement in military recruiting campaigns.

Then things got stupid.

by  
**Jay Babcock**  
illustration by  
**Beau Johnson**

**G**odsmack are a popular rock band who have sold millions of records in the United States over the last eight years. Their fourth album, IV, was released on April 25, 2006. It sold 211,000 copies in its first week in the to debut at Number One on the Billboard chart. Several weeks previous, Arthur had been solicited by Godsmack's publicist for press coverage. Godsmack and Arthur couldn't be much further apart, ideologically. Godsmack singer Sully Erna has been outspoken in support of President Bush, the US military and the invasion and occupation of Iraq. His band has licensed their music to the Navy for use in recruiting campaigns, and some of their concerts in 2003, if press reports were to be believed, resembled war rallies: jingoism as entertainment at best, war for profit at worst. Arthur, meanwhile, has been firmly anti-war since 2002: we dedicated an entire issue to the subject in July 2003 (the cover featured a photograph of David Cross as a war-mad soccer mom, framed by the words "Hooray for Empire! USA - #1 With a Bullet!"), and our opposition to the Bush administration's foreign policy and the military's recruiting strategies has been constant since then—coverlines like "War Pigs in the White House" and "How YOU Can Help Teens Stay Out of the Military" (March, 2004) and "Out, Demons Out! Inside the 1967 Exorcism of the Pentagon and the Birth of Yippie" (November, 2004) kind of make that clear. Although the solicitation for an Arthur feature on Godsmack was kind of puzzling—usually politically minded mainstream musicians steer clear of contact with the politically active press, unless their

name is Ted Nugent—we saw no reason to turn down the opportunity to ask these dudes why they were doing what they were doing with their music. So, on May 1, I spoke with Godsmack singer/lyricist/producer Sully Erna by telephone. Here, with endnotes, is how the conversation went: **Arthur:** Alright let me get the tape rolling here. **How you doing?** **Sully Erna of Godsmack:** I'm good! **How was the Jimmy Kimmel show on Friday? You were outside playing, right?** Yeah it's always cool to do that because it's so set up for musicians, you know. Big stage, live crowd. It's not so like indoors with a camera rehearsals. It's a lot easier. **Yeah. So you got to be back out in front of your fans.** Yeah. It was good. It was fun. **What kind of people listen to your music, do you think?** Ummm... I've seen 'em range as young as 8 and as old as 68. *[chuckles]* So it's... Well, you've seen a lot more of 'em than I have, and I'm trying to get an idea of what it feels like when you're out there—to you, on the stage. Do you think there's a lot of teenagers in the audience? A lot of guys in their 20s? Chicks? Is it a dude audience? I would say, if I had to guess what our age group is, it's probably between ...18 and 40. I would have to say that's kind of where we're at, maybe more, ➤

majority would be 18–30? But we definitely recruited a lot of new fans off of that acoustic record, an older audience. And this record seems to be drawing in a different kind of audience as well, so. You know, we're just trying to continue to expand and not have a ceiling over our heads. **Right. You guys are still having a good time making music after all these years?** Of course. We're musicians, that's what we do. It may not always be great music, but we love making it! *[laughs]* **Cuz music has a power...?** Mmm hmm. It's a universal language. **So what you say with it, and what you do with it, has an effect...?** Of course. **Right?** *[emphatically]* Of course. **So I notice you guys have been really involved with promoting the military.** <sup>[1]</sup> Well, they actually came to us, believe it or not. Somebody in the Navy loves this band, because they used 'Awake' for three years and then they came to us and re-upped the contract for another three years for 'Sick of Life.' So, I don't know. They just feel like that music, *[laughs]* someone in that place thinks that the music is very motivating for recruit commercials I guess. And hey, I'm an American boy so it's not... I'm proud of it. **You're proud of recruiting your fans into the military?** Well, no. *[laughs, then playfully]* Don't be turning my fucking words around, you! **Well, tell me what you mean. You said your music is powerful, it's got an effect, like you said, and you're letting the military use it. The military, who are they recruiting? 18-to-30-year-olds, right?** I guess... I don't know what their recruit age is. I know it's at least 18. **Yeah, they do down in the high schools now.** My thing is... Listen, here's my thing with the military. I'm not saying our government is perfect. Because I know that we make some mistakes and we do shitty things BUT, BUT. You wouldn't have your job, and we wouldn't have our lives, if we weren't out there protecting this country so we could lead a free life. So there's kind of a ying and a yang to that. Sometimes it's not always the best choices that we make, or we stick our noses in other people's shit, but at the same time, we protect this place enough that we're able to like pursue careers and do what a lot of people in other countries aren't able to do. They're kind of picked and they're chosen to be whatever they become... I'm, I'm, I'm proud to be an American, I'll tell you that. **So your country, right or wrong?** Uh, no. Not right or wrong. But I'm proud to be an American. I love my country. I've seen the depressions and how people live in other countries and how they're told what to be, and they don't have the choices that we have. I do love that about our country. So, you know... And I actually sympathize with a lot of the soliders, and the military in general, that are trained to go out and protect FOR us, and what they have to go through, it's really kind of shitty in a sense that these young kids have to go over there and die, sometimes, for something that isn't our fucking problem. And that kind of sucks. So what I have to do is at least support them, because they don't have the choice that we do. **They don't have the choice because...?** Because they've decided to fight for our country. **And they decided to do that because...?** ... *[laughs]*... **Of your song...?** Aw, come on. It's not like that. **Well I have a quote from you here: "We've always been supportive of our country and our president, whereas a lot of people I thought"—and you said this in 2003, to MTV News, you said—"a lot of people I thought lashed out pretty quickly at what we did and I thought the government did everything pretty cleanly and publicly as possible."** <sup>[2]</sup>

Yeah...? **Well, what are you talking about?** That was my opinion at the time. The whole war thing, and trying to keep us up to date like... If you remember, back in other wars, we didn't have the opportunity to follow it through the media, and CNN, and the news—live updates and that kind of thing. And I thought that for the most part you know we were allowed to follow it as best we could through the media sources that were feeding us information. *[incredulous]* **You didn't think the media was being controlled by the military?** Well, it could be. I don't know. **You didn't look into it?** Listen. Are you a fucking government expert? **I'm not telling people to go join the military and then not knowing what the military is doing.** I don't tell people to go join the military!! **You don't think using your songs—the POWER of your music, which you were talking about—has an effect on the people that hear it when it goes with the visuals that the best P.R. people in the world use?** Oh man, are you like one of those guys that agrees with some kid that fuckin' tied a noose around his neck because Judas Priest lyrics told him to? **You were telling me how powerful your music was, and what age the people are that listen to it, and you must have thought, 'Well the Navy sure thought it was useful,' so you tell me.** Hey, listen. The Navy thought.... It's the same reason why wrestlers work out to the music, and extreme motorcross riders listen to the music and do what they do. It's **ENERGETIC** music. It's very **ATHLETIC**. People feel that they get an adrenaline rush out of it or whatever, so, it goes with whatever's an extreme situation. But I doubt very seriously that a kid is going to join the Marines or the US Navy because he heard Godsmack as the underlying bed music in the commercial. They're gonna go and join the Navy because they want to jump out of helicopters and fuckin' shoot people! Or protect the country or whatever it is, and look at the cool infra-red goggles. **You said to MTV, "We're not a very political band but we're supportive of the U.S. military and how they approach things."** <sup>[2]</sup> Listen. Someone turned that around. I never said "and how they approach things." **Okay. So that's a misquote. Or something—** *[interrupting]*: Wow, what— **What about this? I'm reading from a Boston Globe review of a show you did at the Tweeter Center. In front of 13,000 people on May 22, 2003. It said "Godsmack's ferociously high energy 90-minute set started with video footage of Apache helicopters honing in on a desert target, interspersed with the words 'We will prevail...Stronger than them all.'"** <sup>[3]</sup> Yeah...? **So you're using military imagery with your music at your concerts?** First of all, it was a **COMPUTER** image, a computer-animated helicopter that didn't... There was no scene of a desert in there. It was a helicopter that rose up from the screen and scanned the audience. It was an **EFFECT**. And then it shot out missiles that hit the stage. Because the intro to "Straight Out of Line" has the sounds of like, a war thing going on. *[trying to decide if Sully is dissembling or just obtuse]* **Oh I see. So it's just sort of a concept thing.** *[pause]* **Well, you've done a lot to help out the guys who are in the military, who are stuck there now, whether they chose to be there or they got hoodwinked into being there. For whatever reason, they're in the military. And they're doing their job. You guys did a show for them at Camp Pendleton called "Rockin' the Corps." And so you've been doing a lot of benefit shows—** *[interrupting]* Well, like I said, Listen you know, there's a lot of young kids that die for our country, man, and they don't have the choice once they're in there. So I just feel well you know whatever we can do to say "thank you for ➤(46)➤

**NOTES**

**1.** from "Selling War: How the military's ad campaign gets inside the heads of recruits" by Greg Goldin (March 7-13, 2003 **LAWeekly**): "The Navy's [campaign] theme is 'Accelerate Your Life,' which promises 'adventure, travel, career, patriotism, technology, education, honor.' Set to music from the band Godsmack, a voice-over intones, "If someone wrote a book about your life, would anyone want to read it?"

**2.** From June 19, 2003, mtv.com: "Godsmack will return to the States for a headlining tour in the Fall, which like the current outing will offer \$10 tickets to U.S. soldiers. 'We've always been supportive of our country and our president and stuff like that, whereas a lot of people, I thought, lashed out pretty quickly at what we did, and I thought the government did everything pretty cleanly and publicly as possible,' Erna explained. 'We have a lot of respect for the military and stuff like that, and we just wanted to give them something back for what they did for us, letting us live in a free country and that kind of thing. We're not a very political band, but we are supportive of the U.S. military and how they approach things.'" Source:



3. From <http://archive.unearthed.com/?news,2003,05,0000018118>. Steve Morse of the Boston Globe reviewed Godsmack's homecoming concert at the Tweeter Center on Thursday (May 22, 2003) before a crowd of 13,000. "A large part of that crowd—2,000 to be exact—were members of the military who had bought \$10 tickets in the reserved section on the lawn. Godsmack have taken a pro-military stance this spring, and they loaned their song 'Awake' for use in a Navy recruitment ad. Godsmack's ferociously high-energy, 90-minute show started with video footage of Apache helicopters honing in on a desert target, interspersed with the words, "We will prevail ... stronger than them all." From [godsmack.com](http://godsmack.com) forum post: "The show was May 23, 2003. I know, I was there. The video did have a military theme. Besides the helicopter there was images of fighter jets, stealths, and troops. Also not only did the words 'WE WILL PREVAIL./STRONGER THAN THEM ALL.' appear on the screen so did 'UNITED WE STAND.'" From another [godsmack.com](http://godsmack.com) forum post: "Here is the EXACT way I saw the show start in 2003: [digital video text starts] / [something about being in this time] / We, as Americans citizens, need to unite / Supporting our troops, our country, our freedom / And, in the end, we will prevail and remain.... / Stronger than all!!!! [end digital text] [pictures of a tank, jet fighters, troops jumping out of transports & out of helicopters fully armed, another fighter dropping bombs, bomb exploding on the ground, more bombs exploding, helicopters taking off] [Shannon starts drum intro to Straight Out of Line] [Helicopter in video shoots missiles and pyro explodes on stage like the missiles hit there] [song starts]"
4. Erna on MTV News, January 22, 2003: "Unfortunately, there were some really bad things that happened [involving the Middle East], and I think if we don't cut out the cancer while it's still young, then it's gonna grow to be this entity that we may not be able to defend ourselves against. I applaud the government and President Bush for doing what they're doing, and I think our military are some of the bravest souls, much braver than I could ever be."
5. Actually, it's 50,000.
6. The correct number of US deaths as of May 1, 2006 was around 2400.
7. Although it has been criticized for grossly under-reporting civilian deaths caused by the initial U.S. bombing campaigns, [iraqbodycount.org](http://iraqbodycount.org) is probably the best current source on how many Iraqis have been killed during the invasion and US occupation.
8. Source: Department of Defense 1995 Sexual Harassment Survey (Arlington, VA: Defense Manpower Data Center, December 1996)

protecting our country' is what we try to do. I'm not trying to make this a big political issue.

**Okay. Have you done anything to prevent people from joining the military?**  
No.

**To maybe educate them as to what's in store for them?**  
I don't have enough education in the military to educate them in anything.

**Would you let your music be used for anti-military recruiting advertisements?**  
I don't know, I 'd have to see what that was about.

**But you'd be open to it?**  
We're open to whatever, as long as it's not a Maybelline commercial.

**[laughs] Maybelline's more offensive than the military...?**  
No. That doesn't quite go with what we do.

**But the military does.**  
Listen. Where are we going with this thing? Is this interview about the government? This sounds like this is a personal attack or whatever.

**Well I've never seen such a pro-military band as you guys.** [4]  
But we're not! I think *[chuckling]* you're making us out to be a little bit more. When we're asked about something, we just answer the question. We don't go spend 23 hours out of our day supporting the military and what they do. We just simply, an opportunity came up, they wanted to use some music for a recruit commercial. What are we gonna say, no?

**Yeah. How hard is it to say 'no'?**  
Why would we, though?!!

**Because—**  
*[interrupting]*: Is it because you don't feel the same way about the government that we do, makes you right and us wrong?

**Yeah. What do you feel about the government? Tell me what—**  
Aw, that's crazy, man! That's just an OPINION.

**I can back my opinion up from here to tomorrow if you would like to talk to me all day long.**  
Well obviously you've done a lot of research and you've—

*[interrupting]*: **That's right, because—**  
—got a different opinion. We don't know that stuff that you know, so—

*[impatient]*: **Why don't you do some research before you get involved with these sorts of things? You're talking about young kids' lives. You're talking about kids—**  
*[yelling]* Would you rather not have us be protected so they can come and overrun our country?!!

**Do you know what a "fool's errand" is?**  
I'm asking you a question!

**No one is threatening—**  
Would you rather us not be protected?!!

**You know what I'd like, Sully? A Department of Defense, not a Department of Offense that attacks other countries—sovereign nations—who do things in a different way than us, who we have no right to go over and invade and change their governments. Would we want someone else to do that to us?**  
I'm not saying—

**How hard is that to think about?**  
I'm not saying that we were right on every war that we've created. I know that we've been damn wrong at times about stuff—

**When have we been wrong?**  
—but they have also been wrong too! I don't trust someone like fuckin' Sadaam and Osama to come in here and try to control—

*[incredulous]* **When did Sadaam try to come in here and control our country?**  
Dude, *[yelling]* WHY DON'T YOU GO LIVE IN IRAQ THEN IF YOU HAVE SUCH A PROBLEM WITH AMERICA? Why are you here?

**Why am I here?!? This is the top country in the world, my friend!**  
Well, why do you think so? Because it's PROTECTED.

**No one is attacking us, my friend. Certainly not Iraq. Every first world nation suffers terrorist attacks. Get used to it.**  
I am used to it. I don't have a problem—

**Get used to it.**  
*[laughs]* Sounds like you do.

**You're the one that's saying it's alright to not know about stuff and then to send other people to die in our name.**  
I never said that! Don't put fuckin' words in my mouth.

**I've got it on tape, bro.**  
You've got in on tape, bro?!!

**Yeah.**  
You got me saying it's okay for us to attack other countries?

**I got you on tape saying they're protecting us by attacking, by going over there and taking out people.**  
Listen, don't fuckin' turn my words around to make it to what you want it to be! That's not what I meant and you know that.

**Okay I'm sorry. Then tell me what you meant.**  
Listen, I'm not gonna get into a political fuckin' conversation with you. This was supposed to be an interview about the band. Where is this going?

**We're talking about the power of your music and what you're using it for.**  
What is this for anyway? Who are you working with?

**I'm working for my own magazine, my friend.**  
What's it called?

*[laughing in disbelief]* **What do you mean, what's it called? Are you serious?**  
Yeah, what's the magazine called?

**It's called Arthur Magazine. You guys are the ones that set this up.**  
Hey I was just told to do press today, man. I got a checklist in front of me, and I don't have time for a lot of this bullshit.

**Oh yeah?**  
So write whatever the fuck you wanna write, because your magazine obviously is that popular.

**It's doing pretty good—**  
*[interrupting]*: Yeah I'm sure it is. All 3,000 copies of it— [5]

**On our own, without any corporate support.**

I wish you the best of—... Why would you waste your time calling a band like us when you don't even give a fuck?!!

**I certainly do give a fuck. Cuz you know what?**  
What is this about?!!


**Because listen, man! You know there's 2,800 people, my brothers and sisters, have died over in Iraq?** [6]  
Yeah...?


**You know 30,000 Iraqi humans WHO NEVER DID SHIT TO US have died because of the attacks we've made over there?** [7]  
*[in disbelief]* And that's Godsmack's fault?

**Did you know that 78% of women in the military report cases of sexual harassment?** [8]  
*[sarcastic]* And that's Godsmack's fault.

**No, man—**  
*[interrupting, sarcastic]*: That has to do with our new record.

**Okay, let's talk about your new record.**  
I can't believe this. This is *[inaud]*

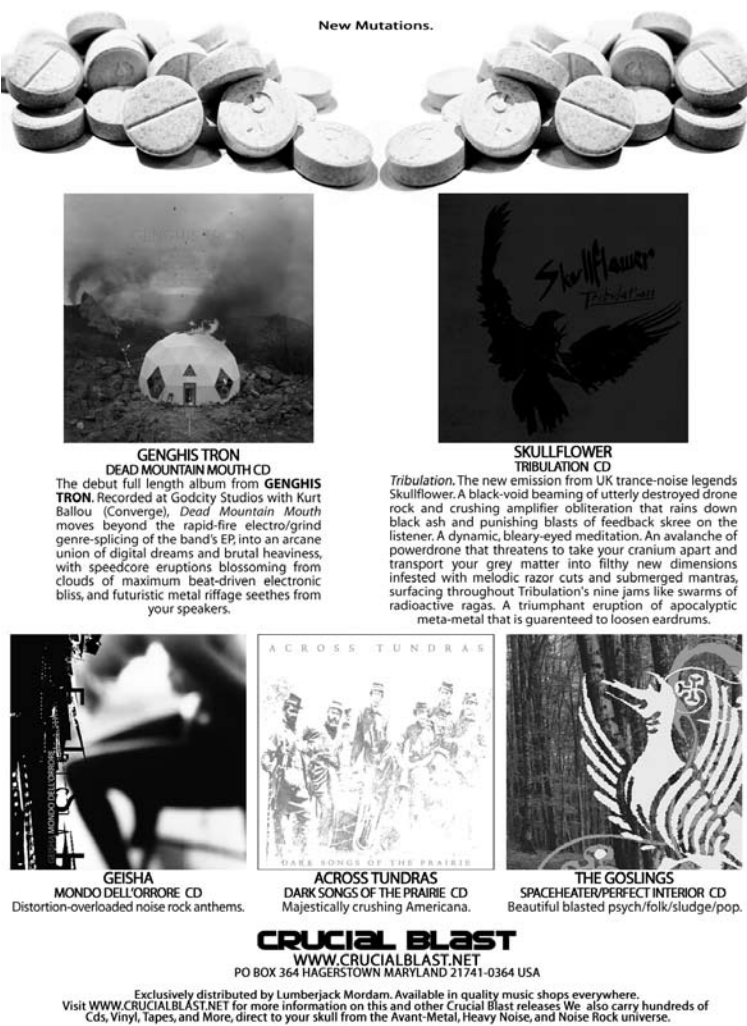
**Let's talk about that new record, my friend—**  
Get a life. *[hangs up]* 



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The BVC is documenting the next 100 years of Western culture, and is seeking proposals of facts yet to come. Each proposal must be based on a metahistory and research proving its validity. The proposal must be presented as a thousand-word article describing the fact, its sensibility, location and time of occurrence. Visual components, such as illustrations and diagrams, are highly encouraged.

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GENGHIS TRON DEAD MOUNTAIN MOUTH CD  
The debut full length album from GENGHIS TRON. Recorded at Godcity Studios with Kurt Ballou (Converge), *Dead Mountain Mouth* moves beyond the rapid-fire electro/grind genre-splicing of the band's EP into an arcane union of digital dreams and brutal heaviness, with speedcore eruptions blossoming from clouds of maximum beat-driven electronic bliss, and futuristic metal riffage seethes from your speakers.

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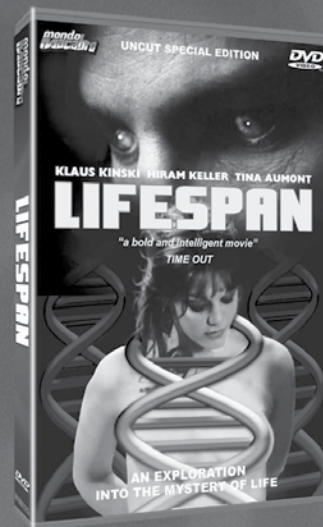
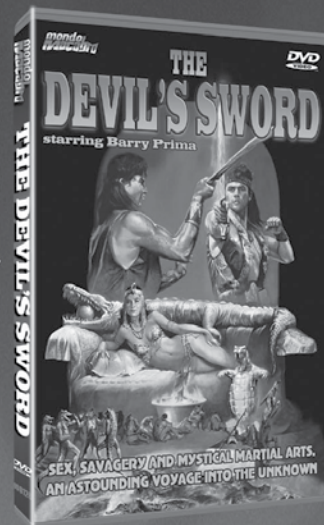
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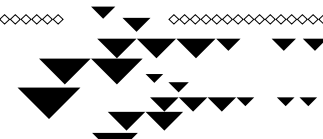


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# Bull Tongue

Byron Coley & Thurston Moore

Explore the Voids of All Known Undergrounds



It's nice to report that **Sickness** has the most goddamned great locked groove we've heard in years. As good as any of the 500 locked grooves on RRR's classic *500 Locked Grooves* omnibus a few years back. It's on the *Sought for Slaying* LP freshly minted by Hospital Productions (not to be confused with the Graveyards cassette on American Tapes with the same title which is only available in the Hospital store on 3rd Street NYC). Sickness has a sewer full of grey life noise releases and is linked to the most ferocious and panting of compadres in that scene. One dude killing it with gore stench tabletop and loving it.

Speaking of **Hospital Records**, Prurient master and store proprietor, Dominick Furnow, has finally opened the amazing Hospital store in NYC. Brian from Mouthus has been keeping us up to date with every nail he pounded into the bins of this basement bordello. It lies below a reggae record joint called Jammymand and not only does it serve up a sweet load of blackness, but it is very very neat. It is also the best art gallery in a city which prides itself in such things. Unbeknownst to the art scene in NYC, this space has the most absurd and arcane *objets de fetishisme* we've ever encountered.

Beautiful box frames containing such brain zapping items as Hair Police Mike Connelly's torn shirt guitar, Dominick's first broken-to-screaming-shit microphones, Emil Beaulieu's button down sweater! We picked up the **Ash Pool** first taste of slaughter cassette on Public Altar, which is Dom's black metal duo with Kris Lapke (dude who plays drums on Purient's *Black Vase* CD). Dom explains Ash Pool as a "black metal sound with more of a ritualized abusive/obsessive sexual theme of demise vs. the usual satanic garbage." We would have to agree definitely—pure hell vibe straight to the core with no time for comic books.

Only other metal we've let pass through the Bull Tongue gate is the weirded-out lung slime of **Bone Awl**. Two fucking insane bastards from Novato, California who go by the names of He Who Gnashes Teeth (vocals, guitars, bass) and He Who Crushes Teeth (drums). We haven't heard their *Bog Bodies/Magnetism of War* LP on Goatowa Rex but if it's anything like the miserable mung heap of their *Up to Something* tape or the split tape they did with The Rita (Canadian noise freaks who we wrote about last issue), then we'll fly to Novota and prostrate ourselves, tongues lagging on hot suburban cement, to get just a taste.

Shit is downright brutal with its amplified pain.

Also intriguing, in a blackened corpse kind of way, is that which is Montreal, Quebec's **Akitsa**. These dark dream mugs issued a cassette years back called *Soleil Noir* on a Montreal label (Tour De Garde), which made many a noir metal enthusiast's butt-hole pucker. It's just been reissued as a pic disc on German rotting carcass label, Raging Bloodlust. As far as this shit goes, Akitsa has an endearing capacity to fall into hypno-stasis repeato-relentlessness with dead simple crunge n' blunt trauma riffing. The cult of Akitsa is strong enough where Raging Bloodlust has issued *Aube de la Misanthropie*, a double LP of demos, comp tracks and way limited CDR heaviness, which really gives you a primer into what seems to be Akitsa's nefarious perception of Quebecois nationalism. Go figure, but go get it for true underground hell-sludge goodness.

Chuck Dukowski is a goddamn legendary figure in terms of American undergroundism. His work with Black Flag, SST Records, Wurm and whatnot have earned him a permanent place at some kinda special table. Anyway, that's our take. Chuck's take is that he has this new band, CD6 (aka **the Chuck Dukowski Sextet**) and they've now released an actual CD after a couple of



Chuck Dukowski and Lora Norton

CDRs. *Eat My Life* (Nice and Friendly) has a cool, strange feel. Dukowski buckled when we called it hippie music, but it's got a real free flow, and the graphics (by vocalist, Lora Norton—check her site for examples) look like Japanese hippie space manga to us. The first half of the album is pretty great—loose, weird rock moves with almost-merch female vocals and aggression hidden in the



smoke. The jazz bits that pepper it make me think of an updated version of the '60s band, Womb, or something. The latter half of the album is more jazzbo-specific, meaning that it's a lot less reliant on riff primacy. And when you've got somebody who plays bass like Dukowski, we're not sure that's the ultimate best choice. But hey—it's his band. It's just nutty to hear "My War" played without that insane bass barrage. Anyway, it beats the shorts offa SWA, and Lora's images have a real bizarre way of sucking you in.

A most exciting music book is *The Sound of Squirrel Meals: The Work of Lol Coxhill* (St. Pauli Druckerel) by **Barbara Schwarz**. Coxhill's fantastic arc as a genius of the soprano saxophone (and other brain/mouth/finger hybrids) is dealt with here in loving detail. There are reprints of interviews, articles, fliers, photographs, record covers. There's an exhaustive annotated discography, a chronology, a list of film/TV appearances, and just a whole pantload of information and wonder. Miss this one at yr own peril. Another fascinating research document is the *S. Burroughs Literary Archive* catalogue from the rare book dealer, Ken Lopez. This is a detailed look, with historical context, about a very important cache of Burroughs' letters, manuscripts, recordings and paintings that was recently sold. Not everyone's cup of jiz, but a great thing for fanatics. Lovers of frozen oink should also check out *Verksted #4/Sonic North* (Office for Contemporary Art Norway). This issue of the journal is a compendium of facts and opinions about the state of the noise scene in Norway. There's a good overview and discography, plenty on Rune Grammofon, Lasse Marhaug, Fe-Mail and more.

**Mouthus** have been simply RAMPAGING from burg to burg, releasing Mouthus and related jams (such as Canada's Cousins of Reggae) on their own Our Mouth CDR imprint. And important Records released their *The Long Salt* CD, which absolutely kills from start to finish. We began investigating the actuality and whereabouts of Mouthus way back when our first lead came from Michael Bernstein, who said his groovy group stroke Double Leopards shared a rehearsal space or some such thing with 'em. As it turns out, the Brooklyn community of Double Leps and Mouthus has continued to expand particularly to the UK and particularly to Double Leps' **Marcia Bassett** rockin n rollin with Matthew Bower of Sunroof! under the aegis of **Hototogisu**. Follow? Anyway what we're getting at is there's a new 2LP, *Crippled Rosebud Binding* with one side each from **Double Leopards**, Mouthus, **Sunroof!** and the 4th side a collab between 'em all. Sounds like it could be a lotta pudding to digest but this monster goes down juicy. Sunroof!, augmented by Bassett and Vibracathedral Orchestra's **Mick Flower**, absolutely stuns with a raw dimensional take on some tune called *Cortez the Killa*. The record is on Music Fellowship and is the fifth installment in their triptych series where they pair three distinctive mofos to mess your dick around. Don't sleep, this baby is already out of print and getting hard to track down.

One more lovely, oversized, English language literary/art magazine has emerged from Eastern Europe. *Blatt*, based in Prague, has a bit more sexual energy than some of its *confreres* and is all the better for it. We are none too conversant with much of the material presented, but the prose and poetry and photography and art are all top flight. The format is goddamn elegant as well. And Michael Jackson's head looks so cute on a deer's body you might well rethink his whole, uh, "situation." Also, sexy as always is the latest issue of **Lauren Naylor's** *Pretend I Am Someone Else*. Dreams, fantasies, poetry and collages, all collide in the shadow of Leeds' largest orgone genera-

tor. Contributors include the immortal **Val Webber**, and Lauren introduces a series of Titcat postcards this time as well. So write her today. One of the sharpest U.S. 'zines to come along lately is *O Sirhan O Sirhan*. The debut issue has a sorta lo-fi look, but the contents are "boobs" as hell. There's an excellent piece on **Henry Flynt's** anti-racist protests of '64, a photo essay of **Deerhoof** relaxing, a **Devendra Banhart** sketchbook, a long interview (and accompanying CD) by sound artist **Jorge Boehringer**, and even more. Excellent peeks!

The fabulous Memoirs of an Aesthete label out of England has released a fabulous cassette by the fabulous **Melanie Delaney** who is part of the fabulous Ashtray Navigations. We always thought that these days AN might be pared down to just founding member Phil Todd, but it seems that Melanie is indeed a primary ingredient of that outfit's contempo primo bliss hiss. Add to that, the fact that this cassette has Melanie partnered with the ultra-fabulous **Bridget Hayden** of Vibracathedral Orchestra and sweet Jesus, you know the unfolding will envelop and save your rotten tongue. We can assure you. The cassette is entitled *Ground Zero Celebration Pessary*, it is lovingly spraypainted and it moves forward with frozen sun guitar/amp melt-zone with an incendiary ALIVENESS. Nice shit m'lady.

**Brother JT** is best known for his musical madness, but he has long been a writer of immense talent as well, although his work is usually available only in fits and starts. His latest booklet, *The Jesus Guitar*, may actually get reprinted by Bastet at some point. Which would be cool, 'cause this is one of JT's best. It's basically an extended essay on his idea of transcendent guitar playing and drugs and records and a lotta other good stuff. Definitely worth some squinting. JT has another volume out as well. *Nine* (Whatisit? Press) is a lovely collection of poems about music, Greg Shaw, D.A. Levy and T.L. Kryss. JT has a beautiful way of connecting interior dots, and observing his journey is a real pleasure.

**Tom (T.L.) Kryss** himself is well-served by *The Search for the Reason Why* (Bottom Dog Press). This is not exactly the Collected Works of Kryss we all deserve, but it is a great sampling of new and old work, both poetry and prose, with a smattering of Tom's rabbit drawings thrown in. It's a lovely collection. Kryss' writing can be as street and real and anyone's, but he also possesses a clarity of spirit that allows him to write about simple beauty without resorting to cliché or tired imagery. The smell and weight and feel of Cleveland (and environs) permeate the text, but we don't think you'd wanna have it any other way. Anyone serious about reading poetry should be reading Kryss. Now.

Because of problems with Chuck Cleaver as a record dealer, I never bothered to listen to the **Ass Ponys** when they were around, even though they recorded for my second or third favorite Northern Ohio record label of the time. Supposedly, they eventually did some major label stuff and almost got popular, but that does not concern us. What we're playing now is a 2CD compilation, *The Okra Years* (Shake It), which compiles a selection of their material from their days with that esteemed label. As with almost all Okra acts, there is a slight rural vibe that pops up amidst the daisies at

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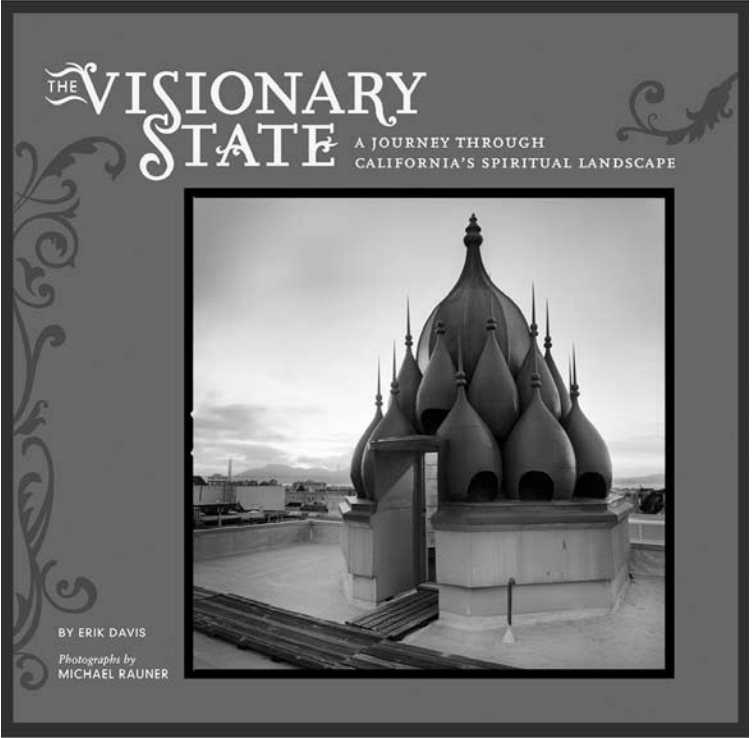
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times, but the overall essence here is like a somewhat straighter version of the Strapping Fieldhands. They have distinct aural connections to the New Zealand bands of the early '90s, but they're not that far from Great Plains either.

**Bradley Lastname** has been boiling around in the punk lit underground for a good long while, and various booklets of his are hidden around here. His two newest books are pretty slick looking, however, even if their content is still quite scabby. *The Squeaky Fromme Gets the Grease* and *What I Learned About Ancient History from Marilyn Murray O'Hare's Rare Coin Collection* (both, Press of the Third Mind) are entertainingly toxic blends of poetry, prose, cut-ups and word games. At times, Lastname comes off as drunken blend of Brion Gysin and Buddy Bradley, but what's wrong with that? Nothing.

Meanwhile, Buddy Bradley's home team (Fantagraphics) has been publishing some particularly great stuff recently. One of the most beautiful is *Jimbo's Inferno* by **Gary Panter**. This is something of a prequel to *Jimbo in Purgatory* and is an equally luscious piece of deluxe hardcover candy. The work itself is not a text-reliant as that other book. Actually, it's a sustained Jimbo story, more inspired by Dante than writ by him. But man, it is a pleasure jumbo! We can never get our fill of this immortal cave-punk's peregrinations. Another sheer stunner is **Victor Moscoso's** *Sex, Rock and Optical Illusions*. Moscoso was both an SF Ballroom poster artist and one the select group of cartoonists who contributed to *Zap Comix*. This hardcover collects a huge batch of its - posters, *Color Comix*, that legendary bus wraparound, etc. If you like the feel of eyeballs melting, you'll be stuck to this for hours.

As we go to press, a fucking **Ashtray Navigations** LP called *Dirt Mummies And Bloody Amps* (Freenoise UK) has just dropped out of God's ass onto our decks and sweet jehovah if it ain't the tits of summer. Phil Todd goes deep inside the tea-room psyche of cold and rain-dead Leeds and really channels the Flevo mama. Churning narcotic swirls of harmonic highness rip off the static needle cling of your sweet-head stylus in a please-don't-stop-now-or-never mode. Tasty mung. Recommended cut: "Greased Whistle." 200 copies numbered. Go!

The latest installment of **Sean Casey's** ongoing book-a-month project is *Cindi's Fur Coat* (The Chuckwagon), which has some excellent poetry about the workplace. Maybe not yr workplace, but you'll recognize it nonetheless. You should also recognize it's a great day when the newest comic/zine/whatsis rolls in from Hello Trudi. The new one is called *Winter Bender* and features **E\*Rock**, **Jonathan Thomas** and **Chase Chivers**. We woulda thought there was some Chambers stuff in here, too, but what do we know? All we can say is that these 'zines are like a nutty cross between Pettibon, Gonzales, Childish and we dunno what else. Great xeroxed art of the most insanely wonderful type. And they just keep coming. If you like that sorta thing, we would also commend *Drawings* (Friends and Relatives). The first issue collects art by over 20 young bastards, and some of it is cruder than Rory Hayes crossed with Dennis Tyffuss. Honest!

New USA label, IDES, has come outta the gate with a full steam of face shredding love. Two cassettes: *Nursery* by **Crib Death** and *Sexuality Is A Curse* by **Climax Denial**. Crib Death is an ongoing project of Spite Records label master and Humectant Interruption wizard, Joel St. Germain, and bud, Anthony Miller. The extraction on display here is a gurgled mouth of cum and beer and if you close your eyes you will dig it and know those things which make reality such a stone gas. Climax Denial from Milwaukee has been strafing death waves for years and is an entity we never became too acquainted with. Our bad, as this release is easily a contender for #1 noise jam of the '06. Usually the sound of a distorted voice from the dry humped anus of a rotten crone would be naught but quaint and hopelessly naïve, but somehow Climax Denial renew whatever value this tradition may have warranted and proceed to rip headlong into a furnace of fucking great noise waste.

**Brian Chippendale** (of Lightning Bolt) was kind enough to send along a copy of a recent comicbook called *Battlestuck Galacticrap*, which is a lovely exploration of Gang Gloom's attempt to sell well-priced and healthful cupcakes to their neighbors (among other things). He also included the first two CDs by **Black Pus**—*Black Pus* and *Black Pus 2* (Diarearama). Ostensibly a solo project, featuring Brian's drums and sax playing, the Black pus disks make me think of an exploding cigar version of that old No Neck side project, Safire. Parts of *Black Pus 2* might even get close to a scum-metal version of Ornette's recordings in Jajouka. Yum! They're both just squinky, chapped-out as hell, and feature wonderful silkscreened covers. **Nate Denver** from Total Shutdown has a swank volume out as well. *Wait, you're not a centaur*. It's a lovely load of stories that run 50 words or less, accompanied by very stylish illos. Our favorite one is probably about Bolt Thrower meeting Jesus, but you go ahead and pick your own. This should be out pretty soon from La Mano 21.

Don't get too many photo books here, but just got a doozy of a collaboration called *The Wheels Project* (Hoover Flag Press), with the work of **Ken Richardson**, **Jasen Strickler** and **Andrew M.K. Warren**. The subject of all the pics is wheeled transport—from slot cars to monster bikes to old Cadillacs and onward. The prints look great, and the organization is good, too. Some of the b&w images are so totally out-of-time they look like they might've showed up in a Robert Frank or Garry Winogrand book from the early '60s. But even the ones that look like they were shot tomorrow have a great vibe—Americans and their wheels. Damn, but they look tickled.

Been spinning **Shawn David McMillen's** *Catfish* LP a lot lately. McMillen is an elusive cog in the Texas kosmiche psyche improv scene of Charalambides and Ash Castles on the Ghost Coast (of which he was a member with Charalambides/Scorces/Taurpis Tula's Heather Leigh Murray). His participation in the nascent activities of that scene is fairly revered, but hard to track ('though there have been sightings with such outfits as Iron Kite, Rubble and most noticeably with Charalambides' Tom Carter and Brian Smith in The Friday Group, who released a cool LP on Beta-Lactam Ring). Emperor Jones has righteous-





**Kathleen Baird**  
Lullaby for Strangers  
EYE 23



A follow-up to last year's *Scatter Ways*, "Kathleen Baird of *Spires* that in the *Sunset Rise* sounds steely and fierce – like a dryad in a spiked tree waiting for a lumberjack to make her day." – *Chicago Reader*.



**Auto da Fé**  
The Spectre  
EYE 24



New project from **Amps for Christ** members **Tara Tavi** and **Martin Kvisic** brings the pan-global with a cracked-out medieval vibe – loosely-spun and tightly corseted, featuring sounds of Chinese folk, European contradance, and eighties goth. Touring the UK in August 2006!



**Avarus**  
Vesikansi  
EYE 25



Members of the Finnish underground (plus **Fursaxa**) continue the party! "Avarus' vicissitude consists of liquid rhythms filling the cracks between surface clatter and scrawl ... in short, **Avarus** are a heavy trip." – *Dusted* Touring Europe with **BF/BS** in August/September 2006!



**Anoice**  
Remmings  
IPT 26



Debut recording from this young, promising Japanese instrumental group. "Anoice hit all the blissful and joyous emotions, and only rarely dip into melancholy like most bands of the same ilk." – *Brainwashed*

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**Rose Melberg**  
Cast Away the Clouds  
DAG 22



First new album in five years from the former leader of **Tiger Trap**, **The Softies**, and **Go Sailor!** "File Under: simply beautiful indie-pop ... if you're already in love with Melberg's voice, or with her simply moving lyrics, all you need to know is that this exists." – *CMJ*



**F/i**  
A Question for the Somnambulist  
SAA 40



Resuscitated from the annals of uber-obscure for another sucker-punch to your third eye, this reissue includes one bonus track from the sessions and comes in a limited edition of 1,000 housed in a deluxe, letter-pressed, recycled paperboard package.



**Paik**  
Monster of the Absolute  
SAA 41



Few bands are as adept at evoking the inherent symmetry in clashing emotions as **Paik**, and this simultaneous wedding of sonic disparity is breathtaking. **Paik** funnel their supersonic cyclones into a tightly focused box of thunder with *Monster of the Absolute*, their greatest balancing act of melody and dissonance to date.



**Nick Castro & The Young Elders**  
Come Into Our House  
SAA 42



Gracefully balancing sixties/seventies British Isles acid balladry and Middle Eastern traditional music with heady, pan-cultural jams, **Nick Castro's** latest features a stellar cast of musicians from folk and avant rock ensembles **Current 93**, **In Gowan Ring**, **Damo Suzuki's Network**, and **Cul de Sac**.



**The Deaths**  
Choir Invisible  
SPA 20



Harmonized pop, ghostly waltzes, and dusty instrumentals that linger like cigarette smoke from a departed lover. "If **John Lennon** made **Plastic Ono Band** without meeting Yoko, the result would have been akin to these minimalist psychedelic reactionaries." – *Chuck Klosterman, Spin*



**Steve Lehman**  
Demian as Posthuman  
PIE 17



"The thing with Lehman is you never know when he's playing the changes and when he's going outside, because he has the smarts to make the one sound like the other." – *Village Voice* Features guest artists **Meshell Ndegeocello** and **Vijay Iyer**.

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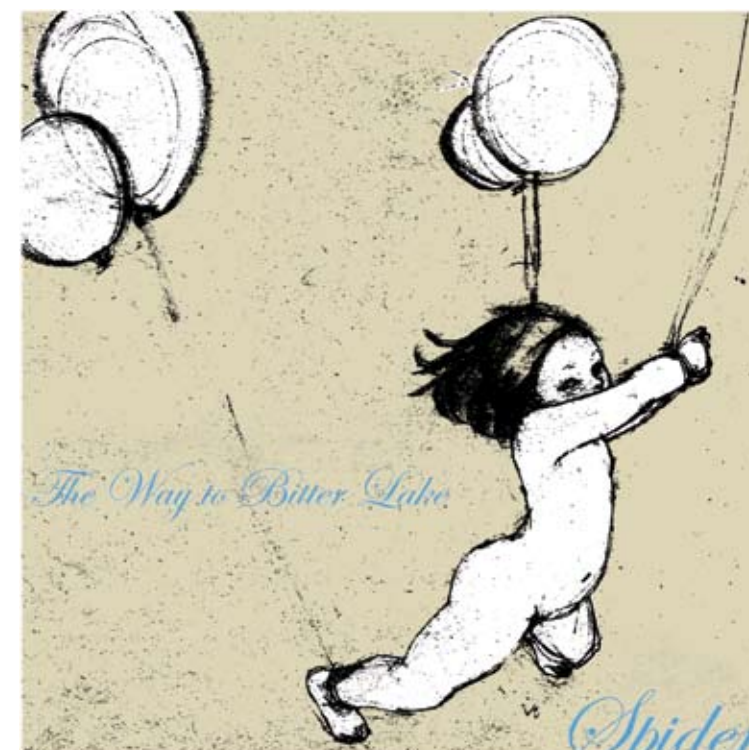
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"Unless Joanna Newsom drops another brilliant album this may well be the very finest folk that New Weird America has to offer this year." – *lefthip.com*

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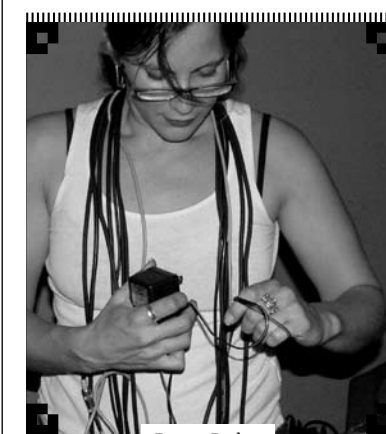
ly stepped up to the plate by curveballing out this McMillan LP, and it's an excellent marker in the diaspora of roving Texas outsider music. Side one is a collection of varying lassitudes-of-song as ethereal gesture, while all of side two is a magnificent heat-drenched spirit improv of strings, bells and humidity. A worthwhile sniff of avant-long-horn dream-guh.

Not entirely dissimilar is the *Since We Have Fallen* LP by **Hush Arbors**. A solo venture by Keith Wood, who you may have seen playing sweet ripping guitar on stage with **Wooden Wand**, **Sunburned Hand of the Man**, and **Zodiacs** (under nom-de-plume **Ezekiel Blackouts III**). **Hush Arbors** is a must for anyone into super contempo sub-strata American folk-psyche modernity. This LP is a numbered edition of 500 and is packaged in a gorgeous letterpress window-cut sleeve designed by the **Blue Barnhouse** gang in Asheville, NC, and released by **Harvest Recordings** also from Asheville. The recordings existed earlier as limited CDR from **Foxglove** but those disappeared fast. Now's the time to jump cuz this baby is the perennial poobah.

**Mondo Macabro** continues to churn out a truly screwball selection of exploitation DVDs from unexpected sources. Their latest coup is a double feature of Turkish films *Deathless Devil/Tarkan vs. the Vikings*. *Deathless* features the immortal superhero, **Copperhead** (actually the son of the original **Copperhead**, but you get the idea). It's a classic of inexplicable topless spy adventurism and an excellent opportunity to watch Dr. Satan get his ass kicked in weird style. But *Tarkan* is the real mindblower here. Huns versus Vikings, two dogs (who are supposed to be wolves) named Kurt, topless hijinks up the wazoo, berserk battle scenes, the best moustache EVER, and an octopus that looks like a rubber omelet. This disk is a real charmer. In a similar vein is *Sweet & Savage* by **Mark Goodall** (Headpress). Subtitled *The World Through the Shockumentary Film Lens*, this is a pretty thorough overview of the genre of films spawned by **Qualitiero Jacopetti's Mondo Cane**. It feels a little academic at times, but we guess that's probably more a function of how dumb much exploito reviewing has seemed since the passing of mags like *Shock Express* and *Pandemonium*. Regardless, it's a great read with synopses and critical writing about most of the important pics. J.C. Ballard on the influence of mondo-style cinema on his own work, and pics, too. How can you miss?

**Donna Parker** has finally released *Debutante* (Twisted Village), her debut LP and it is superb. Feedback oscillations, jammed signals, sick battery effects pedal malfunction all through the hands, ears and heart of **Donna Parker**, who has been one of the consistent musical highlights of the Eastern Seaboard out noise scene. Produced by **Jessica Rylan** (who has a duo with **Donna Parker** called **Secret Diary**—LP forthcoming on **Ecstatic Peace**) this is the record of the summer, with enough beach blanket noise action to sunburn yr brain from beginning to end. It's that good. New Greek freako label **Phase!** has issued *Black Black Heart*, a 3" CDR of **Donna Parker** that has some gnarly zap-switching pieces plus an actual vocal track titled *...This Is Why I Don't Sing*. **Phase! Records** seems to be gearing up for a sweet onslaught of be-

yondo sound solicitation. They've released a ton of cool stuff already from **Kylie Minnoise**, **Reverse Mouth**, **Post Blue** etc. and have to date made three *Phase!* fanzines which have wicked graphix from **Smack Music 7/Blood Stereo's Karen Constance** and a bitchin' interview with **Charlie Ward of Stomach Ache/RRR (!)**. Athens is officially insane. Welcome.



Donna Parker

Great insanity in LP form is provided by Australian **Sean Bailey**, who records as **Lakes**. The eponymous *Lakes* album (**Chapter Music**) is a gorgeously crusty slab of mystery meat. Hard to tell at times if Sean is playing a tippie (ala **Ed Askeew**) or hammering apart a piano or dancing around in front of primitive sequences or what-the-hell? The music has a great, non-generic no-wave punk take on homemade electronics and vocals pushed to great limits of grit. Incredibly, it includes a cover of the **Art Bears'** "Song of Investment Capital Overseas." And it's a tufted winner!

The out of nowhere resurgence of bone snapping harsh noise maestros **Mlehst** has given a lot of us heads a new reason to kill ourselves. **Mlehst** were probably the most intensely skin shredding noise cut up sounds-from-satans-dick outfit of the '90s. We'd relegated them to the miasma of past putrefaction, but the **Belief Recordings** label has recently issued two LPs of **Mlehst** kill-tunage and they're both phenomenal. The **Mlehst** home label pre-Belief was called **Bandaged Hand Produce**, which issued a collection of signpost harshness back in the day from **Telepherique**, **Runzelstirn** & **Gurglestock**, **Brume a.o.** The **Mlehst** dude destroyed all the masters in 2001 (why not?) so we thought maybe this was pretty much a final sayonara but this ain't the case. Along with these two hellacious LPs, **Mlehst** has an 8" lathe coming from **Tasmania's** stench label **Cipher Productions**, a 7" and LP split with **Prurient** due from **Hospital**, an LP on **Nihilist**, and a cassette on **Spite**. Dude is back! Totally tits.

Everyone loves obscure little Japanese comic books, do they not? Certainly! And this little *Ranshi* by **Tetsunori Tawaraya** is a very crazy stew of images. Scatological, smutty, violent, mystical, ratty and arcane, all at the same time, the story seems to be about a quest of some sort. Or maybe it's just about getting out of a rabbit costume. Either way, it's possessed of a vibe that will make yr teeth fill with indescribable flavors. Check out his site—it is filled with wild lines and scents.

Man what is up with **Filthy Turd**? This UK phenomenon has released a toiletbowl



full of tapes the last year or so and they are fascinatingly mundane in their gunk appeal. Our favorites have been the absolutely hideous split releases he has done with Mutant Ape, particularly the Mutant Turd *Disco Anale* CDR on Turddude's own Voltage Stress\*r label. Monsieur Turd has this to say about himself: "I am *Filthy Turd* I am the whore of mystery. I like making noise. If you want me to make some noise for you you know where I am. Noise isn't the only thing in my life. I spend a lot of time picking up signals from foxes, crows and dogs. This month I've been thinking about big girls a lot. The universe is pointing me in the direction of big girls". You can read full on live reportage of Filthy Turd (who creates a hideous mud bath mess on stage), Prurient, Jessica Rylan, Emil Beaulieu a.o. in the latest issue of UK noise skum zine *Idwal Fisher*. It comes out of Yorkshire, where all the children born and raised in the last 20 years or so are seemingly deranged, and infecting the UK landscape with a whole new bungload of power electronics (always the providence of Blighty) and God bless them all. We can't recommend this shit highly enough.

Swankest punk tease this time is probably **The Intelligence's** *Flight of the Donkeys 12"* (In the Red). Four skronky gut kicks by these Seattle-based zone-bandits. They sorta sound like they're whining as the earth collapses around their extremely classic sorta West Coast punk-scrubble. And hey, who wouldn't? On the exact opposite end of the spectrum is the debut LP by NYC's **Apothecary Hymns**. *Trowel & Era* (Locust Media) takes up the new-volk promise of their great 7", adds some distinctly Brit-psych tongue-interlocutions, and comes up smelling like very sweet hay. They really approach all this stuff pretty straight-on, but the rockist touches (sporadic guitar loudness, wide-ass bells, momentary pseudo-epic surging) give things a feel somewhat akin to what later period Pearls Before Swine LPs might have felt like with Bill Harkleroad guesting. Very cool.

**Hospital Records**  
**head hellkeeper,**  
**Prurient wunderkind and all**  
**around nice boy,**  
**Domenick Furnow, lists his**

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Intelligence

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**Bottom Dog Press:** http://members.aol.com/lsmithdog/bottomdog  
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C & D

Two guys reason together about some new records

Note: C & D is a dialogue presented as a series of record reviews, and intended to be read straight through...

**C:** We resume not far from where we left off last issue. Only without D, our lovable excitable German, who has vacated the rumble seat to return to Der Fatherland to observe the World Cup. In his place, quaffing D's beers for this issue only, ladies and gentlemen of the court, may I present to you: F.

**F:** Happy to be here, C. Those are big shoes to fill.

**C:** Relax. After three beers and the proper auditory stimulation, your feet will swell to fit.

Comets on Fire

Avatar

(Sub Pop)

**F:** After five seconds of this record, I can confidently say: Comets on Fire, you made an excitable German out of me. Pummely stuff.

**C:** This blasts off from where their last record left off: frequent flyer acid rock mentality, virtuous verses and choruses, oodles of audible poem lyrics, spry jams, and serious assblasting. A couple songs are slow burners...

**F:** ...that put the power back in balladry.

**C:** The album-opening epic "Dogwood Rust"

slithers into a Hawkwind-Ash Ra Tempel-Stereo-lab-Oneida locked groove around the six minute mark, then ignite into dueling guitar spirals, then some Von Harmonson echotronic. Plus the kind of casual avant garde move that's so natural you almost don't notice it: the electric birdsong at end of "Jaybird," a nice fresh-air breather.

**F:** A muscle-relaxer for the brain.

**C:** For me, this album plugs back into what their labelmates Sleater-Kinney did on their most recent album: laying sweet waste to the center of Ted Nugent's mind by power tripping from the top of the randiest redwoods. This is the Comets' answer record, at least in my personal universe.

**F:** I grok that. Fight fire with Fire! Those dark noontide cymes at the beginning of "The Swallow's Eye," and the chorus guitars on "Lucifer's Memory"...it's crystal clear: Cosmic soul rock kills pain dead.

**C:** And it arrives just two months after the Howlin' Rain album. Howlin' Rain, of course, is the new band spotlighting Comets on Fire singer-guitarist Ethan Miller's songwriterly aspect,

which leans to the Allmans/Dead/Faces side of the highway. And just a few months after Comets guitarist Ben Chasny's latest Six Organs of Admittance pan-cultural acid-folk stunner, The Sun Awakens.

**F:** Not to mention Comets pianist/drummer Utrillo's nuevo Elton John/Bill Fay song project, The Colossal Yes.

**C:** That one 11-minute song on the Colossal Yes album? Wow... [listening to "Holy Teeth"] But back to the album at hand. This is total High Rise/Acid Mothers Temple/Kiss destruction boogie.

**F:** A strange thing about "boogie" is it's been Not Cool for a period about ten times longer than it was Cool. [standing up from the couch] But it never left my behind!

**C:** [averting eyes, mumbling] Christ, F. Boogie if you must but please do it where I don't have to see it. This one ["Sour Smoke"] is like keyboard-driven Fela Kuti meets Television. Can a band be this good?

**F:** Felavision: I wish they had that on the Dish.

**C:** Call your cosmic cable company...

**F:** To paraphrase Foster's: Comets on Fire: it's American for rock.

Vetiver

To Find Me Gone

(diCristina)

**F:** The second album from San Francisco's hziest, gentlest canyon-folk drifters, Vetiver.

**C:** There's a bucolic feel to this I love.

**F:** True, but what's up with the word "bucolic"? The sound of words should correlate to their meaning, and there's something about "bucolic" that always makes me think of a baby with a wet, hacking cough.

**C:** Whereas this music would more likely cure a baby of such a cough.

**F:** Readers with babies might let us know how it works...

**C:** Vetiver's music evokes all those little phases or episodes along a dayhike in the country: the initial entry into the wilderness...the part where you're making serious headway, alone with your thoughts...the moment when the senses are overwhelmed by the nature stimuli, the dew and the sap, the sun's heat and the insects' hum...when you finally you stop for water by a brook, and take a nap in the shade. When Andy Cabic sings, "I climbed so high/the sky dropped down to teach me," he's tapping into the naturalist in all of us.

**F:** I heard somebody say you could call this kind of music 'naturalismo.'

**C:** I also heard somebody say that the real reason music originating from the West Coast underground—all the aforementioned bands, Brightblack Morning Light, etc etc etc—is so beautifully gone right now is because of the



Ethan Miller of Comets on Fire onstage at Arthurfest, 2005

Photo Jeremiah Garcia/icecreamman.com





high potency of the marijuana out here.

**C:** While I am not stoned at this time, I swear I just looked out the window and saw a burrito fly past.

**E:** Yeah, that's Vetiver, working the California tradition: Flying Burrito Brothers, Neil Young, the Mac of course, the original Charlatans from San Francisco...

**C:** And of course the late under-lamented Beachwood Sparks, whose final EP had some of this same swooshy nature euphoria and next-afternoon melancholia. Not that this is mimicry. Cabc's songwriting here goes beyond recidivist texture gesture. It's a very subtle, tricky thing Vetiver does, mellowing the harsh but resisting the corn. They use violins instead of fiddles.

**E:** Whoa, this song ["Red Lantern Girls"] is amazing! It's like a horse just trotting along, and then alluvasudden, this squalling and sustained one-note electric guitar solo [courtesy of guest Brad Laner (Medicine/Electric Company guitarist-composer)] kicks in and the band breaks into a gallop.

**C:** Vetiver: cures coughs, cleanses palates. Use hourly.

#### Awesome Color

*Awesome Color*  
(Ecstatic Peace/Universal)

**C:** Whoa!

**E:** Yowza!

**C:** These guys get on that train and ride it back to Cincinnati 1969! Total Stooges in Iggy's-Got-the-Peanut-Butter-Again mode...

**E:** Yeah, but even more than that— Sound of Confusion-era Spacemen 3, especially on this track "Dinosaur": that's the sound of a band refusing to learn more chords or grooves because they already found the best ones.

**C:** Concentrating on tone and psychotic drive, like all the greats, like our national treasures The Cramps and Tav Falco and of course the 13th Floor Elevators...Awesome Color are...uh...awesome.

**C:** I've got to admit that my inner adolescent thinks this is the coolest shit possible.

**E:** I hope they're all under 18, and there better be some brothers in this band.

**C:** This song ["It's Your Time"] features some actual choogle.

**C:** Which brings us to the question that has haunted many a rock fan: what, exactly, is the difference between the boogie and the choogle?

**E:** Would that be choogie or boogie?

#### Zizek! DVD

(Zeitgeist)

**C:** Dude, I'm trying to play this DVD, but you totally messed up my system while reconnecting the TV to the stereo so you could watch the World Cup in surround-sound.

**E:** I think that D, absent as he is, would've approved. Anyways, it was worth it to hear the Mexican TV commentators hollering so sonorously.

**C:** Okay, here we go... This is a documentary about Slavoj Zizek, the Slovenian philosopher who's known as "a one-person culture-muncher" and "the Elvis of critical theory."

**E:** He looks more like Klaus Kinski. Or Yakoff Smirnoff.



Slavoj Zizek

**C:** Blame it on the beard. Zizek's basically this super erudite dude who is also a willfully contrary polemicist commenting on everything under the sun as he goes. As he says, "The duty of philosophy is to redefine problems, not to solve them." Here he is on a tour of colleges...he sees a girl carrying some Evian and remarks, "Water in a bottle—it reminds me of socialism."

**E:** This guy's great! Reminds me of the biting, death-obsessed comedy of the late great Brother Theodore. I believe Zizek speaks as a friend although he expounds with fiendish fervor.



Awesome Color

**C:** Fiendish fervor is right. Zizek is a pre-post-modern man. He was raised in Communist Yugoslavia, but when that all went to bloody hell, he became a Christian atheist.

**E:** I knew I dug this guy. He's got some zingers, like when he talks about being "up to your shit in ideology."

**C:** Zizek cuts through the tripe. Here he is watching an old televised broadcast of Lacan giving a lecture. Lacan is one of Zizek's primary influences, but he is not in awe of Lacan: "I find his emphasis and gestures ridiculous....I'm a total enlightenment person, I believe in clear statements."

**E:** Like Zizek says: "I always tell the truth. Not the whole truth, because one can't."

**C:** My favorite part about this film is where Zizek proudly shows us that he keeps his clean laundry in the kitchen cupboard.

**E:** You've got that much in common...

#### Beavis and Butthead

*The Mike Judge Collection*

*Volume 2 DVD*

(Paramount)

**C:** Meanwhile, at the other end of the philosophical spectrum...

**E:** Beer me!

**C:** Y'know, there's so much product that comes out these days, so many records, DVDs and CDs, but I still feel like there's a void Beavis & Butthead left that remains unfulfilled.

**E:** Hey, Zizek's doing his best.

**C:** Hard to imagine Zizek calling Lacan a "dillhole" though. It would be so cool if they made a new Beavis & Butthead movie, like, checking in with them ten years later...

**E:** In the meantime, creator Mike Judge is putting out these super-packed DVDs, and it's amazing to watch the classic cartoons uninterrupted by erase-your-blemish commercials.

**C:** The titles alone are remarkable: "Wet Behind The Ears"—"Premature Evacuation"—"Here Comes The Bride's Butt."

**E:** "Bang The Drum Slowly, Dumbass."

**C:** I love when the screen goes dark, right before the show starts, and you can only hear their immortal "hunh-huh-unh" laughter. Ohmigod, I love this one, where they go in to the plastic surgeon to get their "thingies" made bigger, but [uncontrollable laughter] instead the doctor gives them boobs! [falls off the couch]

**E:** Settle down, C. How many brownies did you eat?

**C:** I dunno. Is the baggie half full or half-empty, buttmunch?



#### DIRTY ON PURPOSE

Hallelujah Sirens

"...Betrays traces of Yo La Tengo, Sigur Ros and Belle & Sebastian while managing to keep a cheeky, wide-eyed tone of its own"  
—Pitchfork Media

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LET'S JUST HAVE SOME FUN



#### SHEARWATER

Palo Santo

"Shearwater, today, remind me most of Mark Hollis and late Talk Talk."  
—Said the Gramophone

MISRA



#### THE FUTUREHEADS

News & Tributes

My, how time flies! After two years, several US and European tours, and one finely-crafted debut album, The Futureheads return with this terrific follow-up, which ranges from dark and melodic, to crunchy and raucous, to just downright fun. The Futureheads are back to make their furious mark in an endless quagmire of faceless bands and albums. And they're here to stay.

STARTIME INT'L/VAGRANT



#### WE JAM ECONO

The Story Of The Minutemen

The acclaimed documentary on the too-brief life of one of the most revered, intriguing, and inspiring American bands of all time.

2-Disc DVD Set with over 3 1/2 hours of bonus interviews and vintage live footage.

PLEXIFILM



#### JUANA MOLINA

Son

Argentinean singer Juana Molina's fourth album combines the gentle folk melodies and bubbling electronica that has made fans out of David Byrne & Belle and Sebastian.

"Molina's delicate vocals glide and dip, leaving Bjork earthbound on the shore and pea-green with envy." - *Magnet*

DOMINO



#### BRASS CASTLE

Brass Castle

The debut by Brass Castle plows down the tracks like a wasted locomotive on an express line, as long undulating bouts of rhythm erupt with Southern grit.

VELOCETTE



#### OH NO! OH MY!

Oh No! Oh My!

Austin expatriates play fuzzy pop to walk to your girlfriend's house by. What a day for a drive-by shooting!

OH NO! OH MY!



#### WITH LOVE

A Great Circle

The debut U.S. release from this mainstay of the Italian DIY scene. Includes a DVD with an experimental film/music video by vocalist Nico Vascellari.

GSL



#### EVANGELICALS

So Gone

"Evangelicals builds dizzying, complex pop songs that tease with sweetness and stun with serrated melody that lingers long after the final notes fade."  
—*Oklahoma Gazette*

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# the cairo gang



self titled debut  
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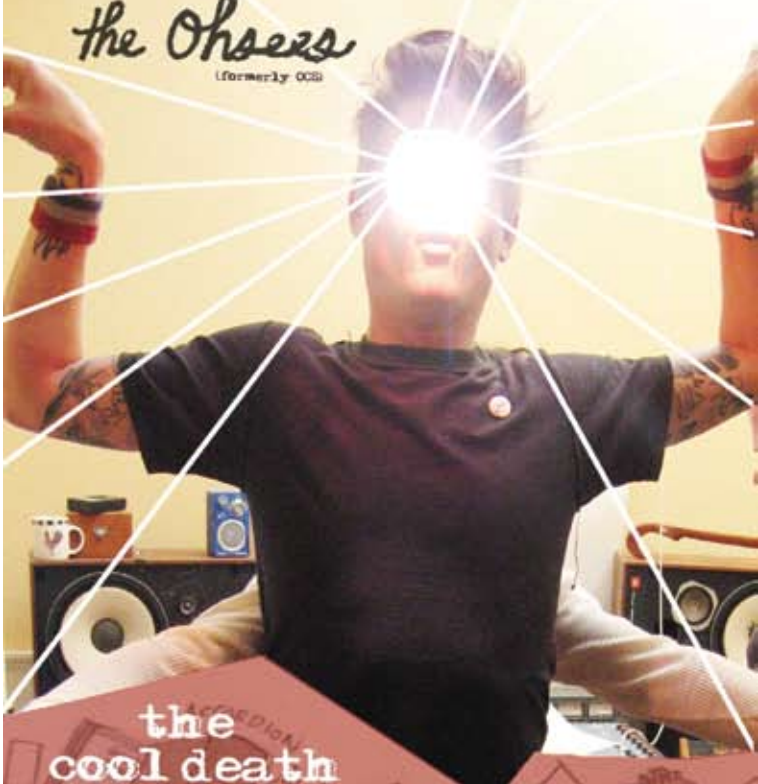
The Cairo Gang has been a lingering passion for Emmett Kelly, a stimulated singer/songwriter w/an impressive list of musicians in his rolodex. This album perfectly tweaks the butterflies in all of our stomachs...deep, soft rock for tobacco tinged hearts...Groovy & ghostly imprints that leave one feeling completely defeated yet wide-eyed enough to paint a few self portraits without a single cringe!"  
-The Chicago Reader



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# the ohsees


(formerly OGS)



the  
cool death  
of island  
raiders

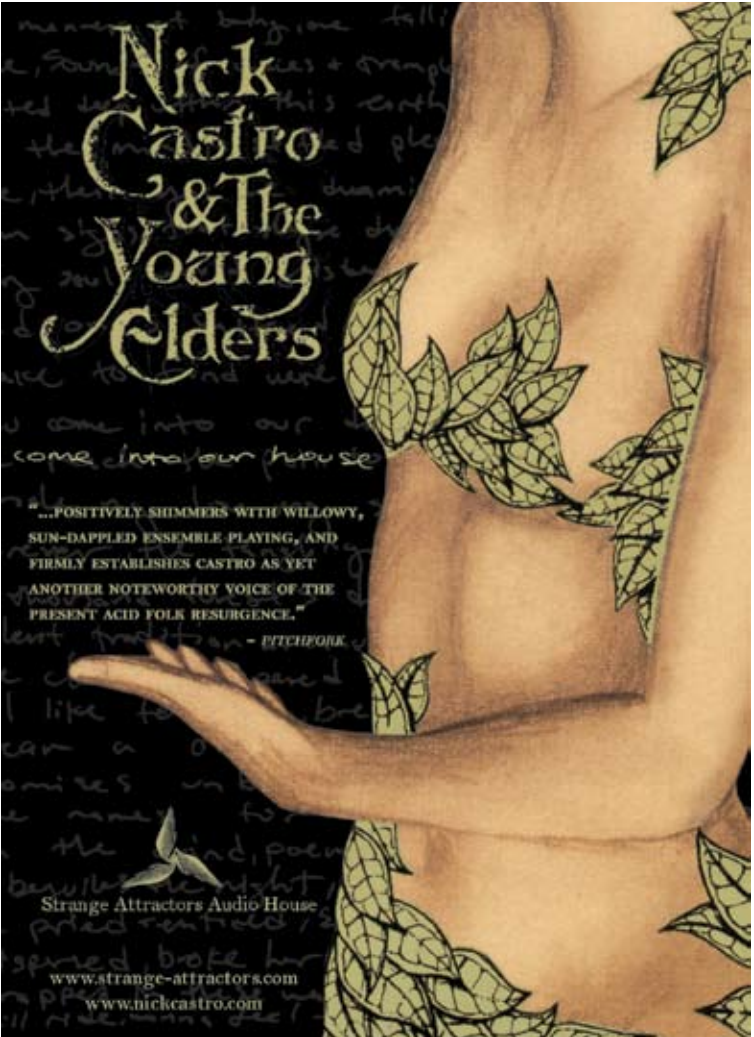
produced by Dave Sitek  
of T.V. on the Radio  
features John Dwyer  
of Coachwhips

cd/lp in stores



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# Nick Castro & The Young Elders



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www.nickcastro.com

# AN ALBATROSS

BLESSHEMY [OF THE PEACE BEAST FEASTGIVER AND THE BEAR WARP KUMITE] LP » JUNE 27, 2006

"AN ALBATROSS IS PHILADELPHIA'S SIX PIECE ANSWER TO THE FUCKING DOLDRUMS OF LIFE IN THE MODERN WORLD...THE BIGGEST COMPLAINT ABOUT AN ALBATROSS IS: THERE IS NOT ENOUGH AN ALBATROSS." - MODERN FIX

"SPAZZY ART-PUNKS AN ALBATROSS MAKE ELECTRO-NOISE TERRORISTS THE LOCUST LOOK LIKE THE BACKSTREET BOYS." - PHOENIX NEW TIMES

# ACID MOTHERS TEMPLE & THE MELTING PARAIISO U.F.O.

HAVE YOU SEEN THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY LP? » JUNE 13, 2006

"...UNLIKE THE SHOEGAZERS WITH WHICH THEIR MUSIC HAS SO MUCH IN COMMON, MAKOTO KAWABATA SINCERELY BELIEVES HE'S COMMUNICATING WITH THE COSMOS. A STRANGE GUY TO BE SURE, BUT MOST GREAT MUSICIANS ARE GIVEN TO SOME ECCENTRICITIES." - PITCHFORK


# MICHAEL LEVITON

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**Phi Ta Khon: Ghosts of Isan DVD**  
*Directed by Robert Millis*  
*(Sublime Frequencies)*

**F:** Feature-length film about a weird three-day street festival in Thailand, sometimes referred to as "Mardi Gras from Hell." Whoa. Talk about awesome colors.

**C:** You see, this is what America should have learned from pre-Katrina New Orleans. All this industrial technology and computer whatsits and the Intervoid is so much unnecessary fuzz. To coin a paraphrase, what the world needs now is less competitive work-laboring and more communal partying.

**F:** Preferably in blazing demon masks made from coconut husks.

**C:** Yes, decadence on the cheap. Whiskey drinking at dawn and total second-line parades featuring guitar-and-flute ragas on flatbed trucks, amps powered by car batteries, people waving hand-painted papier mache phalluses with strange tips. When the grid crashes, this is how I hope we'll party. Of course we'll probably have to wait til then. You'd never be able to get a permit for something like this in public in America, home of the so-called free.

**F:** I like the Sublime Frequencies approach. They stand in awe of this planet's inhabitants' strange beauty: they bear witness. They just say LOOK, they don't even try to explain--well, not much--what's going on. Their approach is, This shit is so deep you don't even have to know anything about what it is you're seeing to receive some its power. It's that rich. They're busy grokking. They're feeling fascination.

**F:** They are the real human league.

**A Visit to Ali Farka Toure DVD**  
*Directed by Marc Huraux*  
*(Digital Classics)*

**C:** I stand in awe of Malinese guitarist Ali Farka Toure. His death earlier this year was a tremendous loss: his playing was part John Lee Hooker, part original African dance blues, all sensationally blazing and lyrical and celebratory, as well as appropriately contemplative and entrancing, and he was notoriously...well, as they say, touched. I never got to see him play live, because I was very foolish in my younger years. And of course now that he's gone, I finally get to see him...on DVD.

**F:** This is a feature-length documentary film made by a French film crew in 1999, apparently, around the time that Toure cut back on his international touring in order to work his farm, not far from Timbuktu. "My main concern here is to grow enough food to be self-sufficient," he says. "Whatever you do in life, you need a full stomach. When you're hungry, you can't think about anything."

**C:** The whole story is just so perfect you keep laughing in disbelief at each new revelation or claim--it's your choice. He talks about being the tenth son (the other nine died), the word "Farka" meaning "resistance," living in a town called "Niafunke" (say it aloud), enduring a childhood of near-slavery ("I had to push a 200lb barrel of water all by myself"), speaking and singing in three languages but reading none, having a grandmother who could communicate with nature spirits, and his year-long stay with witchdoctors at age 11. Or when he says, "There are millions of things that can be explained but some things can never even be mentioned." And there's the performances, like the one where Toure says, "I have to tell you that tonight is different from other nights. It's true. I'm with the devils tonight." He's totally sexy, abandoned, rocking, almost disturbingly unguarded.

**F:** One thing's for sure: the guy had huge hands and beautiful clothes.

**C:** And he knew how to bend desert air.

**Tony Allen**  
*Lagos No Shaking*  
*(Honest Jon's/Astralwerks)*

**C:** [listening to track 1] Okay, that's it. I hereby rescind the dance ban. [gets up from couch] I gotta close these blinds.

**F:** Mr. Tony Allen is, of course, the brilliant drummer and co-creator with Fela Kuti of the Afrobeat sound. They say he played like four drummers, but that was a long time ago. I think now he's up to six.

**C:** [air drumming wildly] If only all the songs on here were this good. Unfortunately half of them feature vocals that are just inappropriately slick singing with banal lyrics that borrow from Fela's righteousness but not his wit, bite or joy in metaphor. But when Rolling Dollar sings, it's a vintage Afrobeat clinic session that'll make your feet weep.

**Eccentric Soul:**  
**The Big Mack Label**  
*(The Numero Group)*

**F:** Talk all you want about digging in the crates, but first someone's gotta dig up the crates.

**C:** And the Numero Group's Eccentric Soul reissue series--of which this is the latest--is excavation par excellence.

**F:** I'd never heard of the Big Mack label, but apparently even if you lived in Detroit in the late '60s and early '70s you probably didn't hear of it either.

**C:** [Listening to Mae Young's "The Man Put Sugar In My Soul"] Is this CD on the wrong speed?

**F:** Only if you can't dance that fast. What incredible energy. I nominate it as One of the Best Songs Ever.

**C:** Big Mack--more than a burger.

**James Hunter**  
*People Gonna Talk*  
*(Rounder)*

**F:** For a moment here I thought this was a missing disc from my Charlie Rich box set, and this was 1962. But in fact this is new. It's just got that sweet soul something, yet it's got a rock'n'roll backbeat, but really he's singing exquisite torch songs. I gotta say, James Hunter, a pompadour-sporting white British guy, reminds me of chiefly of Sam Cooke.

**C:** The fact that he recorded it at London's noted bastion of analog purity Toe Rag Studios makes sense. Almost nobody does this kind of music in this style. Hunter's craft is so fine, his commitment so total. Listen to "People Gonna Talk."



James Hunter

## New Releases distributed by FORCED EXPOSURE



**TUJIKO NORIKO**  
*Shojo Toshi+ CD*

A reissued version of this 2001 international debut, going on to release albums for Tomlab, Room40 and Fat Cat. *Shojo Toshi+* contains some of Tujiko Noriko's most accomplished songs, beautifully abstracted pop with shards and splinters of alienated sound, all building up to that voice. Remastered by Pluramon and including 5 bonus tracks and new artwork.

"A pure Haiku, B+." - Stylus Magazine



**EDIP AKBAYRAM**  
*Edip Akbayram 2CD*

When it comes to mind-destroying eastern-tinged psychedelic rock, Turkey is the most intense country of them all and this massive 2CD is one of the best documents yet to emerge. Officially licensed from Turk legend Edip Akbayram directly, this represents his first CD recordings to be readily available for Western society. 90 minutes of fuzz guitar, electric sax and Edip's dark voice. A Shadoks insta-classic.

SHADOKS MUSIC



**BARDO POND**  
*Ticket Crystals CD*

Philadelphia's über-psych quintet return with their sixth studio album. More original signature doom tempo and multi-layered drones. "Our feeble contemporary recording devices are nearly incapable of properly replicating its enormous force and beauty." - Fakejazz

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**THE NORTH SEA AND RAMESES III**  
*Night of the Ankou CD*

An immense collaboration between London-based psychedelic-ambient three piece Rameses III and Tulsa's finest free folk rebel, Brad Rose aka The North Sea. Rose is behind Digitalis, a multi-media wyrd folk empire while Rameses has played with Jack Rose, Fursaxa, Sir Richard Bishop and others. A journey into the ambience explored by such acts as Popol Vuh or Stars of the Lid - a match made in heaven.

Type



**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
*Musics In The Margin CD*

Out July 11th. From the ceaseless catalog of Sub Rosa comes this fascinating collection of outsider music. Culled from extremely limited pressings (single pressings event), this is outsider art from around the world. This anthology links Daniel Johnston and the great Wesley Willis with a dozen other spiritualists and visionaries. Included: a 12-page booklet of drawings and lyrics with 25 tracks in all. Completely unique.

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**GIUSEPPE IELASI**  
*CD*

The second release from Ielasi on the highly-regarded Hapna label from Sweden. Electro-acoustic improv that updates folk to its most modern incarnation. Five untitled, complex ruminations that glow and spark. "Giuseppe Ielasi structures his quietly rigorous solo recordings with intent and acuity, interrogating each sound event and restricting his palette to the most appropriate sounds."

Dusted Magazine

Hapna

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Talk"—his guitar lick's so tasty, the roll's so sweet, it captures that swinging moment when ska evolved into rock steady but still bore the clear influence of American soul records.

**E:** I would say Hunter is brown bread to Edwyn Collins wry.

**C:** One more quip like that and you're going straight into the pun-ality box.

**E:** I've been yellow-carded for wordplay.



**Ramblin' Jack Elliott**  
*I Stand Alone*  
(Anti)

**E:** Original folksinger Jack Elliott is 75 and from the sound of things, he's knocking on heaven's door.

**C:** What a beautiful, perfect album. The songs here sound happy but the words—about favorite dogs, old trains, the suckiness of arthritis—are by turns sad and ruminative. He's know what's been lost, and he knows the ramble is probably nearing its end. But he's not entirely sad about it, which gives the songs—and banter—a mischievous tone.

**E:** Jack's just doing the ding-dong-ditch on ol' Death, I betcha.

**Loren Connors**  
*Night Through: Singles and Collected Works 1976-2004* // 3-CD box  
(Family Vineyard)

**C:** Slow chilling weird blues arcs carved by a graveyard guitar instrumental master. No ghosts, though—just a man before the Big Empty.

**E:** Dark, dark, DARK.

**C:** Definite dark night of the soul stuff.

**E:** It's gorgeous, but I'm terrified.

**Charalambides**  
*A Vintage Burden*  
(Kranky)

**C:** Almost unbearably beautiful new album from this long-running co-ed guitar duo, now apparently based in Texas. [listening to the perfectly titled 20-minute instrumental "Black Bed Blues"] A warm breeze on a summer night, the windows' curtain flutters. Outside the tall Texan grass sways. You're sleeping with your girl in somebody else's bed. The sunrise is cloudy, gentle...

**E:** Two people underneath the Unnameable Vastness, instead of one. Pure mutual longing.

**C:** My recommendation? Give this to someone you love.

**The Golding Institute Presents**  
*Final Relaxation*  
(Ipecac)

**C:** Informed Arthur readers know that the Golding Institute is associated with with notable non-comedian Neil Hamburger.

**E:** [reading sleeve] "Your ticket to Death through Hypnotic suggestion." This should go over well with the Doom crowd. Zizek will dig it, and maybe Ramblin' Jack Elliott too!!! [puts CD in player]

**C:** Oh dear. I think if you slipped this into amongst every commuters' positive reinforcement self-help tapes, you could really change some lives.

**E:** By "change" I think you mean "end."

**C:** Give this to someone you don't love. **(3)**

## FILM CORNER

### The Bad Guys

**The Road to Guantanamo** is a thoroughgoing demolition of the lies and unlimited incompetence of Powell, Bush and Rumsfeld says John Patterson.



Prisoners await transfer to Guantanamo Bay in Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross' *The Road to Guantanamo*.

**"W**e are Americans. We don't abuse people who are in our care." Thus spake Gen. Colin Powell in reference to the United States' grotesque and immoral confinement of "unlawful combatants" at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Those remarks would have been news to the prisoners who committed suicide there recently, but also to the three kidnapped and incarcerated young Britons of Pakistani descent known as the Tipton Three—if they'd had access to news of any sort at Gitmo. It turns out that, having also been deprived of access to lawyers, the Red Cross or even their own families, the Tipton Three knew as little of the outside world for two-and-a-half years as the outside world knew of the goings-on inside Guantanamo's gruesome Camp Delta.

Not any more. Thanks to co-directors Michael Winterbottom (24-Hour Party People, In This World) and Mat Whitecross, the Guantanamo genie is forever out of its bottle. Using interviews with the three men, who were finally released from Gitmo in March 2004, interspersed with harrowingly persuasive recreations of their journey to Guantanamo via Pakistan and Afghanistan, and of their terrifying experiences in US military custody, *The Road To Guantanamo* constitutes the first corroborated witness account of America's Gulag to stand a chance of being widely seen in the United States, whose populace has hitherto seemed disturbingly content to snore its way through the progressive dismantling of its Constitution.

The shattering experiences of Ruhul Ahmed, Asif Iqbal and Shafiq Rusal—which included being abducted by Afghanistan's Northern Alliance and sold to US Forces as Taliban members (for a cool \$10,000-per-head bounty—this is where our money is going?), solitary confinement, torture, 5-on-1 beatings, hoods, shackles, blinders, sensory deprivation and being witness to extrajudicial murders—

make for a thoroughgoing demolition of the lies of Powell, Bush and Rumsfeld. American viewers, long accustomed to our child president's characterization of Gitmo inmates as "bad guys," may find themselves asking how their own military could be so fascistic, so cruel and, most dispiriting of all, so fucking stupid.

Named for the West Midlands town where they grew up, the three young men flew to Pakistan, the home of their parents, to attend the wedding of one of their number, but also to enjoy a holiday in their land of origin, in the aftermath of 9/11. Foolishly, they took a side-trip into Afghanistan, where they were caught up in the US bombing of Taliban bases and cities, and then captured in the confused retreat from Kunduz.

Accused of consorting with Bin Laden and the Taliban, the Three in fact had watertight, easily verified alibis. Two of them were—and how hard is it to check this out?—on police probation in Tipton for petty criminal acts, the other had a full-time job. That wasn't enough for their captors, gut-wrenching proof that American military xenophobia extends not merely to hated enemies, but also to valued allies. Unlawful combatants: meet unlimited incompetence.

The imagery confronting us in *The Road to Guantanamo* suggests that the United States has abandoned its sanctimoniously proclaimed fealty to such secular gods as Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton, only to replace them with Orwell, Kafka and Koestler. Two years of nonstop torture, interrogation and physical abuse—stress-holds, strobelights, earsplitting death-metal, enforced silence, isolation cells—strongly recall Gestapo or KGB information-gathering techniques, Room 101, Darkness at Noon. All that is lacking are electrodes, waterboards and clocks striking 13. And Big Brother? He's already here. Learn to love Him. **(3)**

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- Bernstein/Heavy Tapes



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David Watson	Islaja																	

## LUJO RECORDS SUMMER 2006



### ROY ROY KILLED JOHN TRAIN

"Roy Killed John Train" is second full length and fifth overall release by the band. The band has previously released records on Fueled By Ramen and Initial Records. "Roy Killed John Train" is a significant leap from Big City Sin. While the melodies, smart lyrics, and genre-hopping of previous work are still present, Roy has pushed ahead into new territories, favoring mangled-up chords to standard major-chord folkisms, sparse drumming to bashing cymbals, delay to distortion. '80s and '70s artists for inspiration instead of indie records from the late '80s and early '90s, and quietly sowing the seeds instead of crashing out of the gates. Roy has taken a new approach to their band. Roy consists of ex and current members of Balab, These Arms are Snakes, and Barkanov.



### THE DARK ROMANTICS ANOTHER SONG...EP

The voice and brains behind the bands Denison Morris and The Party People, Eric Collins has combined what he loved and learned from both projects and some of his favorite music into The Dark Romantics creating a darker, cooler, groovier sound with enough blues and twang mixed in that you can't help but to get up just to get down. With brother-in-law Evan Lorenz, who also did time as the Denison Morris drummer and lead guitar god of The Party People, as his partner in conjuring up the new midnight sound. Two songs from The Dark Romantics' debut ep were recorded out west with Jason Martin of Starflyer 59 behind the wheel. The rest were recorded in sunny Florida by the bands and Aaron Marsh from Copeland. A great first taste from a band people will surely be talking about very soon.



### BABY TEETH FOR THE HEATHERS EP

Baby Teeth play Southern-fried anthem rock minus the beer bellies and bandanas, prog-discs minus the stringy hair and capes, and falsetto wails from the hellhells of a glittering stage all right for attention, but don't let the recent loss of this write up fool you—they mean every last bit of it. They made the EP on a dare, with each member working in complete isolation at home. The only rule being that the title had to be "Heathers." In a way these three songs are broader than a regular album 'cause you get to witness all the chaos that usually got left on the editing floor. Jim Cooper made sparkles gallop across the horizon, Peter Andreadis made a stinky cowboy, umbrella-drink jam, and front man Pearty Sweete composed a deeply mellow, tender experience. Also included is a brand new song performed by the whole band and a remix of "End of Actress" from the Baby Teeth Album.



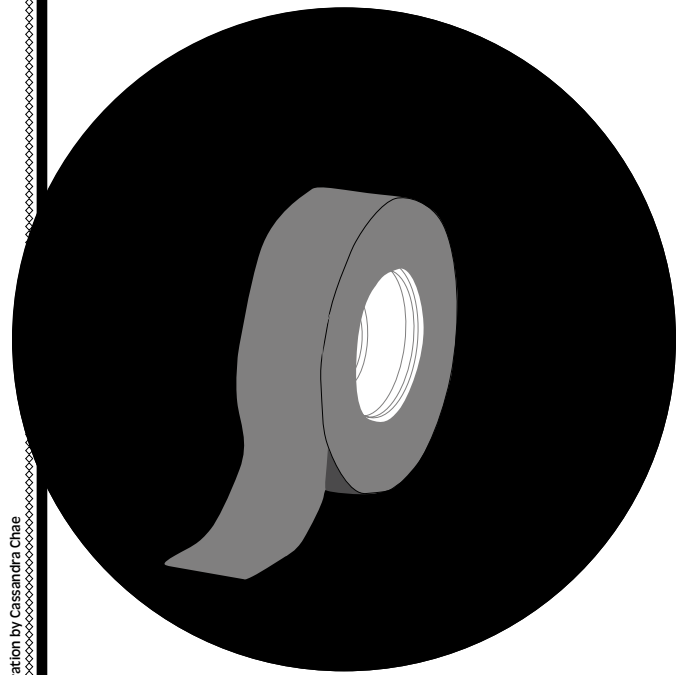
### RED & GOLD YOUR NAPOLEON

Closer in resemblance to a hit and run than to an album, this EP will hurt you and then leave you. A quick and abusive songs featuring multiple desperate vocals, cross guitars, with secret melodies buried somewhere in the wreckage. Sing along and sing alone, because it was't last long, and soon you'll be craving more from Red and Gold.

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# TRIGGER HIPPIES



**Do The Math**  
by Dave Reeves

**B**lackout. Summertime. Populace accepts that utility companies have again fried the grid for profit. Hours go by. Americans go without television, SUVs, flash-fried food. Coffee runs out. Shortages of chronic and chronic shortages. Rumor becomes news. Alcohol reserves are drunk away and the rabble seethe in the street, commiserating about how it was this very publication that printed the recipe for the diabolical bomb that left the assholes standing but killed their precious machines. Emergency personnel stay at home because, like that great American Bob Dylan said, “The cops don’t need you and, man, they expect the same.” The National Guard is busy on the border, the French Quarter and Iraq. Everyone is a suspect. “There he is! I saw him reading that *Arthur!*” the mob yells.

And then, dear reader, you realize that when the transistors are dead, the world is run by a lower phylum of machine: the gun.

Now I’m not saying you need to get one, but you can never be too careful what with this *Arthur* magazine monkeying around with these new-fangled technology bombs. Of course you are scared of guns because the liberal media constantly portrays people misusing these valuable tools. The smart hipster won’t let crappy television writers’ abuse of the pistol as a modern day Deus Ex Machina divert her from the path of preparedness. Just think of a gun as one of those “Talking

Sticks” at a Rainbow Family Gathering: if you have a Talking Stick, you get to say something and people have to listen, and if you don’t have one you have to shut the hell up.

Here’s a list of “sensitive weapons” that even a vegetarian could use in the near future, cribbed in these last precious moments while this computer still works. I’ve listed them in the order that they should be purchased, so that you may gradually warm to the idea of being a citizen capable of doing what it takes to keep America on course.

## BLOW GUN/SLING SHOT

No big whup. These aren’t even weapons. They’re fun! When worse comes to worst and emergency supplies run out, you can shoot some apples out of the tree for food. Added bonus is that when the overarmed zealots take power and make the Holy Bible the law, getting that “eye for an eye” with a slingshot will be more sanitary than using your fingers.

## AIR RIFLE

Don’t let the word “rifle” fool you. It’s nothing but a toy which, with a little duct tape, can be modified into a directional claymore mine should an emergency situation arise.

Your dad should have given you a BB gun when you were eight, but since he didn’t love you enough to let you own the gift of freedom,

I’ll give you the basic rules right quick:

1. All guns are loaded all the time, even when they are not.
2. You’ll put your eye out.
3. Fried squirrel is delicious.

A fun thing to do is get a target and put a picture of your least favorite politician on it. Practice taking his eyes out from further and further away. Try not to blink when you pull the trigger!

## SHOTGUN SHELLS

Okay, now that you’ve purchased a toy facsimile of a real gun you’re not going to feel so funny about purchasing a box of shotgun shells. These aren’t weapons, they’re just ammunition. Nothing wrong with that. You can still vote Libertarian.

Now let’s return to our scenario: A mob is at your door demanding food and water, not that you have any. Luckily, you took my good advice and got an air rifle and a box of shotgun shells. The time has come to duct tape a shotgun shell to the end of your BB gun. Be sure to line the BB’s path from the barrel so it hits the firing cap on the shotgun shell. If you wait until the last minute, it only takes a minute.

Once the trigger is pulled, the BB will travel up the barrel and hit the cap. The cap then explodes, sending birdshot flying to poke little holes in everything for about 30 feet square in front of you, resulting in the distinctive stria-

tions in an assailant known as a “Tennessee Tattoo.”

As a liberal you love this weapon because it is tacked together with duct tape, clears a room faster than Al Gore and, like Karma, it doesn’t kill. Use the valuable shock and awe time to duck out and run run run. Make your way to Humboldt, Asheville, Lawrence or Canada. Travel by night. Moss grows on the north side of the trees.

According to a guy who lived in a post-E-bomb environment all the time, Thomas Jefferson, “The tree of liberty must be refreshed with the blood of patriots and tyrants from time to time.” The liberty tree is looking rough right now because all we feed it is this new blood. Blood is fine like wine and needs some age and body to come alive. I’m sure Bush and Cheney wouldn’t hesitate to give some blue blood to the liberty tree, if some sharpshooter put a bullet in their eye. I’m not saying (in print) that anybody should shoot the president, but good citizen, get a BB gun and work on your aim. Soon we may have to provide a clear mandate that these criminals will not be able to misinterpret.

Hanging chads won’t matter when it’s time to hang George, dear patriot. ☹



## camera obscura

let’s get out of this country

The brilliant new full-length from this Scottish sextet, brimming with infectiously soulful, shimmering pop music.



## lambchop

damaged

This Nashville collective’s ninth album—quiet and haunting, with a hushed austerity that is uniquely Southern yet oddly universal.



## spoon

telephono / soft effects EP

After a 5-year absence, we are delighted to reissue remastered versions of Spoon’s first two records packaged as a double CD set for the bargain price of a single album.



## white whale

WWI

The maiden voyage of a landlocked group of rock veterans from Lawrence, Kansas. Alternately described as furious, mesmerizing, and most definitely seaworthy.





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